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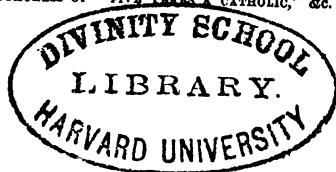
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1851.

THE PROGRESS OF BEGUILLEMENT
TO
ROMANISM.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE.

BY ELIZA SMITH,
AUTHRESS OF "FIVE YEARS A CATHOLIC," &c. &c.



Seeleys.

FLEET STREET, AND HANOVER STREET,
LONDON : MDCCCL.

TO THE

REV. W. H. HAVERGAL, M. A.

RECTOR OF ST. NICHOLAS, AND HONORARY CANON, WORCESTER ;

WHOSE COUNSEL AND ASSISTANCE,

IN THE WAY OF TRUTH,

HAVE PROVED MOST BENEFICIAL,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS GRATEFULLY

INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHORESS.

PREFACE.

SOME apology may be necessary for the publication of the following pages.

By many who have kindly perused my former narrative, "Five Years a Roman Catholic," a wish has been expressed for me to narrate the incidents of my perversion to Romanism, and to give a more detailed account of my experience while a Romanist.

This in my former little volume, modesty, and the fear of becoming tedious, prevented me from doing. The unanticipated interest and kindness, however, with which that little work has been received, and which I can only account for on the principle that the language of the heart appeals to the heart, encourages me to venture on what was then felt to be too delicate ground. Fully requited indeed shall I be for any sacrifice of personal feeling which the effort occasions me, should my dearly-bought experience be made beneficial to only one individual who, from like causes, is in similar danger.

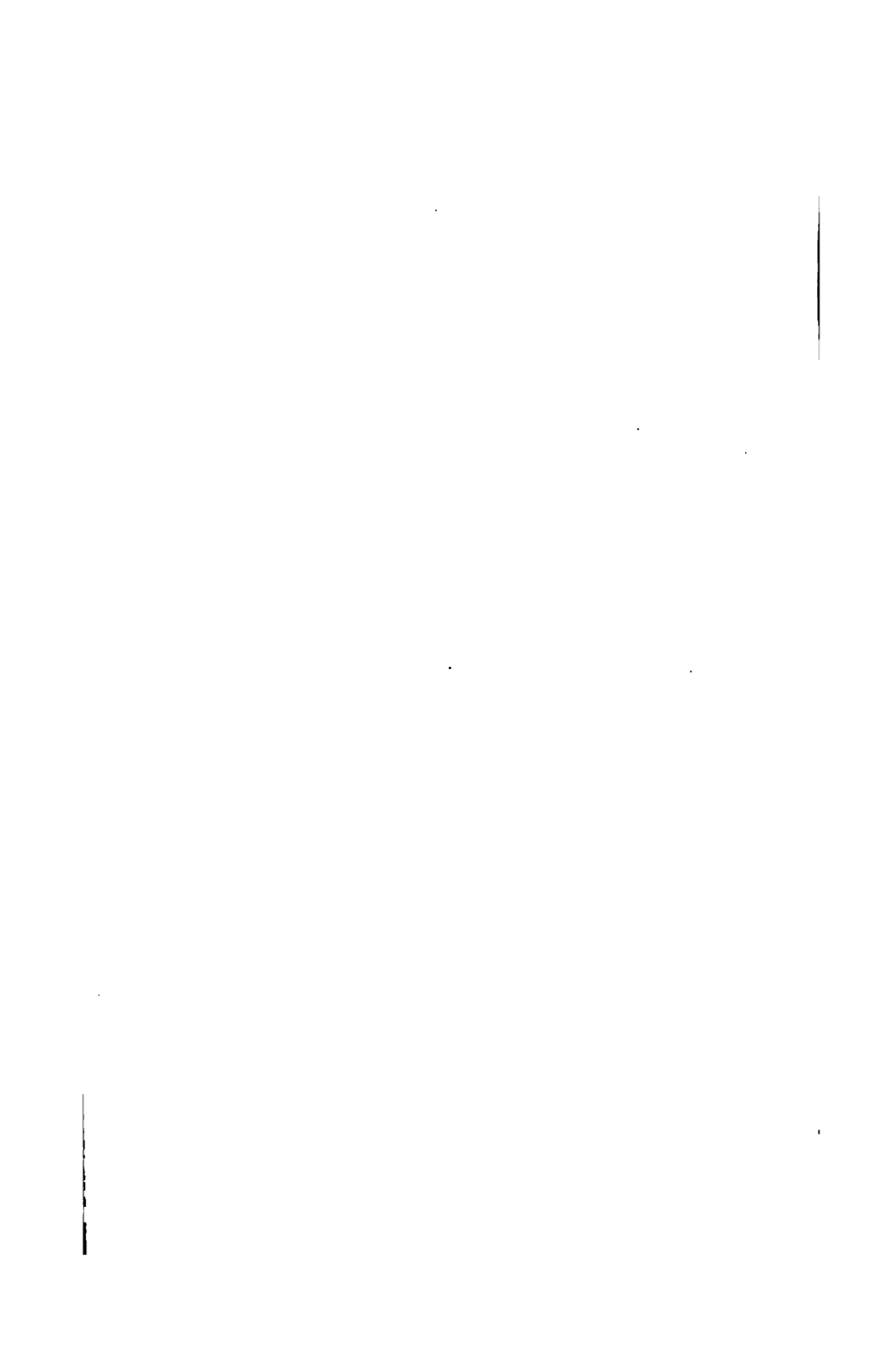
A word on the *style* of the present Narrative may be allowed. As stated in the Preface to the Second

Edition of the one already alluded to, my having written in the third person has laid me open to misconception, and possibly has suggested doubts as to the veracity of my statements. I have therefore felt it incumbent upon me, in this instance, to avoid all possibility of such misunderstanding; and though I frankly confess, contrary to my own inclinations, and I fear, somewhat to the detriment of my freedom of expression also, yet I have deferred to the judgment of those before whom my own must bow, and have written plainly and unadornedly in the first person. In doing this, I acknowledge that I have felt great dread of appearing egotistical. The extreme delicacy and difficulty also of exposing the inmost thoughts and feelings of the heart before the world, has made me almost hopeless of accomplishing my task even tolerably well. But, be this as it may, I have endeavoured to put aside all personal considerations, and commending myself to the kindness of the reader, have, as simply as I *could*, followed the plan suggested to me as most likely to be generally useful.

Fain would I indeed, at any cost of individual feeling, prevent others from tasting the bitter chalice it has been my lot to drink. Fain would I, by any lawful means, however difficult, shield the pure-minded and sincere from the dark ordeal through which I have passed; and fain would I warn the

ardent and imaginative of the deceptive character of the glittering snare spread out to entangle them. With this view alone I have written. This also has induced me, though perhaps it has appeared somewhat irrelevant to the point, to enter so largely as I have done into my feelings and experience *previously* to becoming a Romanist; because I doubt not there are others who are liable to be led by a similar train of thought and reasoning, to precisely the same fallacious conclusion. No lower aim could have induced me to commit myself thus painfully to the public gaze. How far the end may be accomplished, depends solely on the blessing of Almighty God. For this I earnestly and humbly pray, leaving Him, as seemeth best, to accept and crown the unworthy effort.

E. S.



THE PROGRESS OF BEGUILLEMENT TO ROMANISM.

CHAPTER I.

I would have call'd, adjuring the dark cloud ;
To the most ancient Heavens I would have said,
Speak to me ! shew me Truth ! through night aloud
I would have cried to him, the newly dead,
Come back, and shew me Truth !

HEMANS.

It is now more than seven years since the evening when the incidents occurred which I am about to narrate. I select it from many other occasions, of perhaps more general interest, because the emotions which characterized it became in some sort the culminating point in a particular and critical era of my existence. It was a point where sceptical reasonings and mental perplexity had reached a climax of really distressing import ; the results of which proved to be a long course of practical error, as blinding as it was dangerous. Its consequences, too, were productive of suffering, both keen and protracted. How

well I remember that evening, and the crowd of incongruous and oppressive sensations which almost overwhelmed me, as I endeavoured in vain to reply to a train of questions and sophistical speculations, which came thronging like spectres to harass and annoy. I had for weeks been striving to banish such reflections, and if I could not solve the difficulties which beset me, at least to think and reason upon them no more. But some conversation which I had that day been having, with an individual holding religious principles as fixed as mine were vague, had afresh awakened all the emotions, of late *constrained* to be quiescent; and the full tide of pent feeling rushed back with the strength and force of a torrent, which has burst the barriers, restraining it from flowing in its natural channel. Unable to endure the presence of my friends, I fled where I could indulge my feelings unchecked; and in the solitude of my chamber, before the open window, stood gazing upon the scene without, in a perfect chaos of bewilderment and excitation, which I could hardly analyze or comprehend; and with which it would be impossible for any to sympathize, but those who, *feeling* as deeply on the subject of religion as I felt, have been similarly tried. The night was surpassingly lovely. The moon was nearly at its meridian: the stars in their chastened beauty, in eloquent harmony, thronged the vast expanse of heaven. The landscape, too, beneath, was fair; while the mellow and silvery light which alone revealed it, made it look fairer still. Every object within the range of vision whispered in accents as irrefragable as sublime—"The hand that

formed us is Divine." But not at that moment was such an impression conveyed to the eye which rested on them. All was perfection, beauty, order, as matchless as supreme. No architect but a Divine One could have fashioned such a scene: no power but that of Deity could sustain and uphold it. The impress of Jehovah was stamped indelibly on all above, around, beneath. And to the Christian mind, the mature intellect, guided by the light of revelation, no effort of proud human wisdom, which uplifts itself above the wisdom of its Creator, nor of poor human reason, which finds a stumbling-block, whenever its finite cannot grasp the Infinite, could for a moment have broken a link in the chain of such infallible evidence. But I possessed neither a mature intellect, nor a mind imbued with fixed Christian principles; quite the contrary of both. I was yet young, with a spirit undisciplined, and too accustomed on all points, even the most grave, to think, speculate, and decide for myself; often, alas! in accordance with the extremest principles of human folly, instead of the dictates of sound argument and truth. I had read much; but my reading had been of the wrong character; and I had thought more, but the thoughts had been suggested by the enemy of my soul and revealed religion. A new train of reflection had, however, recently opened upon me. A feeling estimate of the value of my soul had been its harbinger; and deep sorrow for the temporal and eternal punishment, entailed by sin, one of its results. I had looked out into the world around me, and witnessing the wrong, and sorrow, and desolation with which it is,

and ever has been, so rife, retired into the chambers of my own heart to meditate upon and enquire into the origin, and reason, of such wide-spread ruin. And as the enquiry rebounded back upon my mind without a response, save the fallacious one my crude and short-sighted judgment prompted, I mentally asked, even of the Deity, "Why should these things be?" while rapidly followed all the series of dark doubts, impious questioning, and mad conclusions, in which proud reason is sure to become involved, when the pilot, Faith, has left the helm. A vessel without chart or rudder, I wandered in unknown seas, through whose rocks and quicksands one hand alone could have guided in safety, one compass pointed truly to the pole,—the revelation of God. But, as in days of old, this is, to the wisdom of the world, foolishness still. And for the time lured by this wisdom, like myriads more, similarly misled, I followed on, plunging deeper and deeper into error, until it threatened to involve me inextricably in its dark and subtle mazes; and the light which had once beamed brightly, seemed upon the verge of being extinguished in final darkness, while I eagerly pursued a course of study and investigation, which promised fair to separate me still farther from the primeval source of truth. But this could not be done without many a struggle; and bitter and protracted ones too. There were times when, forgetting all that for the moment ensnared me, I cried to heaven alone for succour, and implored its aid to discover the truth. But, alas! it was not at such a moment that I have opened this Narrative.

I had some time before experienced the loss of a sister and brother. Just opening into life, both had been cut down, and as I had watched them "descend so young into the cold grave," and missed their loved companionship and familiar presence, often had I mentally asked the question—Where are they now? and whither gone? True, in both instances the light of evangelical religion had irradiated the dark valley, and in one strikingly soothed the dying pillow. And this should have taught, have convinced. But if it were illusion! if it were but the feeling which had sustained the heathen martyr amidst torments unutterable, the strength of enthusiasm which had supported the hero's soul in death! Poor reasoning! worse than puerile. But my understanding was perverted, and again and again, in untold misery of mind, I would despairingly exclaim, "Speak to me, shew me Truth." This day had been particularly fruitful in such reflections. In addition to the conversation already mentioned, I had heard very recently, a discourse more remarkable for rash zeal than charity, which condemned the human race, *en masse*, to inevitable perdition, a favoured and chosen few alone excepted.

This was too much. Disgusted with the limited intelligence of the man who could thus set bounds to the brightest attribute of Deity, and still more so by the strange want of benevolence exhibited; I returned home to brood upon my disquiet, and nourish (or *poison*) my soul, by reasoning as sceptical as absurd. Alone, and in darkness, excepting such light as the rays of the moon emitted, I remained the prey to ideas and feelings of a deeply harassing and pain-

ful character. I looked at the deep blue dome above, "rich in its regal gems." There it rose in its vast infinitude, no thousandth part discernible to mortal vision. It was a charm, a mystery. But beyond it I could not penetrate. I looked upon the earth around. It too lay bathed in a flood of radiance and peerless beauty, lovely enough to constitute a spell. But beyond the surface of things *here*, I could not penetrate. No lightest atom around could I explain, or adequately comprehend. How insignificant I felt; how truly blind and helpless! And yet I was rushing on to eternity. Yes, as rapidly as the restless stream of time could carry me, I was hastening to the beyond. Oh where! whither! A few days, or months, or hours, might bring me, as it had my kindred, to the land which makes all things equal. "Oh that some spirit from the other world, would come and teach me truth. Oh, for one word, one look, one signal, that there is reality in my childhood's teaching. My sister, my brother, come and tell." With almost frantic energy these words were uttered, and many more of the same and still wilder import; while my pulse beat quicker at the thought of encountering the dread revealer I had invoked. I however called, not upon God; or if I did, it was without a right faith to give efficacy to my prayer; hence the labyrinth of error and darkness, into which I was subsequently permitted to wander. Of course such madness brought no response, yet still, long and long I remained, indulging in the same strange strain of reverie and invocation. The hours wore on, and the darkness of midnight settled on all around, a deeper,

denser darkness still, encompassing my soul. The morning dawned. The glorious beams of the sun chased each lingering shadow, revealing all of earth that was revealable, but brought no light to me. A prey to spiritual blindness, from that time I wandered farther and farther on, under its deadening influence. It was a faint foreshadowing of what was yet to come.

CHAPTER II.

It seems perfection, beauty, all that God,
Might on his needy creatures have bestow'd ;
A light to illume, to bid all darkness cease ;
A guiding star to happiness and peace.
Pause yet awhile ! it glows but to ensnare,
Of its illusive loveliness beware ;
It seems a beam reflecting Heaven's own light ;
It lures to shades of death, and endless night.

MS.

TIME rolled on, and weeks and months fled rapidly. Nearly a year had passed away, since the night I have recorded. But it had brought no change of a pleasing character to my mind. Since that night I had in fact become deeply involved in negative unbelief. The farther I wandered from the only source of truth, the more palpable became the darkness which settled on my soul. And from at first quibbling only at what I could not understand, I now indulged in a spirit of cavilling at all things alike, until doubt had grown an element of my existence ; and there was scarce one isolated portion of the revealed dispensations of the gospel, which I could be said believingly to embrace. Oh unhallowed license of the erring spirit ! Oh dreary self-abandonment to all that can deface

and ruin the soul ! Oh pitiable and weak forsaking of all that can redeem and beautify existence, and alone reconcile the seeming irreconcilability in God's dealings with His creatures. Cast away the Divine revelation of the Creator, and what becomes of the creature ? The apostle has said all that can be said upon the subject, in a beautiful and perfect image. "Wandering stars are they, lost in the blackness of darkness for ever." And rich was the harvest I had reaped of the poisons I had sown. Days of existence passed away, without an object, and without a hope. Hours of gloom and shadow, I could not define or rise above. Moments of uncertainty and darkness so dreary, that they well-nigh degenerated into despair. Nights of watching, as restless, and more desolate than that I have already described. True, I sought in ideal life, in the occupation of my intellect, in a course of study, and frequently in giving the wildest rein to my imagination, to drown the upbraiding of a faithful monitor ; who would, despite all efforts, *make* his still small voice be heard. But it would not do. Poetry, history, sterner pursuits, the fictions of the novelist, though they might bring temporary oblivion, could not still effectually the sound of the war within. And often and often would the truth of the *word* I presumed to doubt, resound in my ears, with unanswerable application ; "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God."

In this state of mind I accidentally fell in with some works treating of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic religion. The child of too much imagina-

tion, I had long felt a more than vague interest on the subject. Brought up from earliest days to regard it with the deepest prejudice, I had yet given too wide a scope to my freedom of thought, not to have cast some of this prejudice aside. And as I traced the connexion of this faith with all the past, from the earliest periods of history down to the latest, and saw it intimately associated with monarchs, empires, poetry, war, and chivalry; so that hardly the literature, arts, or political transactions of any era, but in some measure owned its sway; my undefined and general interest, ripened into a deeper one; and again and again I asked myself the question, Could the faith which had exerted so large an influence on the destinies of mankind, be in very truth, all its opponents had taught me from childhood to believe it?

Susceptible also to the poetry of things, I often viewed Romanism in *this* pleasing but illusive light; loving to dwell in connection with religion—which I had almost began to disclaim—on so many agreeable and attractive images. There was so much to gratify the senses, so much to appeal to the imagination, and to awaken the enthusiasm; so much to minister to the sentimentalism, and fill the energies of an ardent mind; in fine, so perfect an adaptation of *human skill* to *human nature*, in the whole frame-work and mechanism of the vast machine, that the furtive glances cast at the outworks from time to time, begat a longing to examine more closely and in detail, its internal and intrinsic value. The lexicon to this examination, if I may use such a phrase, was supplied in the works I have alluded to; and eagerly,

even with almost passionate avidity, they were seized on, and minutely perused. And oh how different the delineation to what every other course of enquiry had hitherto furnished! It needed not the aid of the already strongly-awakened sympathies, to perceive this in all its force, and convict one party or the other, of vast discrepancies somewhere. The view presented on either side was irreconcilably opposed. Sophistry was woven into so artful a web, that the trifler with it, could not escape its meshes. The art which can make "the worse appear the better reason," had been here so cunningly exerted, that light seemed darkness, and darkness light. The chords of the human heart, that fearfully responsive instrument, had been so skilfully touched, that every one re-echoed a note of harmony. The faculty of veneration, the strange grasping after something above and beyond our limited sphere of intelligence, was here met with wonderful adaptation. Even the vulgar passion for the mysterious and wonderful was gratified to satiety. Every lack was supplied, every void filled, every necessity provided for. There could not be more perfect suitability to the cravings of humanity. The scheme was faultless as complete. Thus glowed the *theory*. Thus it was in *seeming*. A perfect picture truly it presented. None but an All-wise artist could so harmoniously have mingled the colours, said human wisdom; and so it does still to numbers who are trusting to its false estimate. Thou fool: "The wisdom of man is folly." God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways."

"Eliza," said a Christian friend, one day, who had been for some time watching the eagerness with which I devoured a controversial work I was perusing, "do you remember the quaint old adage? 'It is impossible to play with pitch without being defiled.'"

"Perfectly," I replied, without raising my eyes from the object of my study;—"to what do you mean to apply it?"

"Do you not perceive the application? Try and discover it."

"I have no time to solve problems just now," I answered, somewhat impatiently. "Do not interrupt me, I beg."

"I do not wish to do so rudely, my dear girl; but I wish I could interrupt the nature of your present occupation, not only *now*, but henceforth and for ever."

"Why so?" said I, slightly aroused to interest.

"Because I fear you are treading on very dangerous ground."

"Well, if I am, it does not follow that I shall fall. But again, why so?"

"Can you ask me? Is it no light danger to be tampering with error; and sucking down with avidity the poison that will perhaps destroy you?"

"You are quite metaphorical; too highly so for me entirely to follow your flight."

"Nay! you are wilfully evasive. You comprehend me readily. You know, or should know, that the theory you are studying, is as sophistical as it is dangerous."

"Quite in keeping with the charity of the Evan-

gelicals !” I replied : for I had already imbibed enough of the spirit of the system I was investigating, to venture on sneering at Protestants.

“ My dear Eliza : is that the way you speak of the religion of your Fathers ? of the faith in which you have been educated ? ”

“ Pray, allow me to ask one question. What is the *Faith* in which I have been educated ? ”

“ What a question ; if you did not know, I would reply to it.”

“ *That* is evasion, if you please. If I had satisfactorily known, I should not have made the enquiry.” A look of deep grief stole over the face of my friend, and she merely remarked. “ I fear you must be far gone, indeed.”

“ Too far gone, not to see through the flimsiness and instability of the system you would uphold. But that is not the result merely of my enquiry into Roman Catholicism. I was convinced of it long since, and if it could have satisfied me, should not have sought elsewhere.”

“ And will Catholicism satisfy you, think you ? will you there find the soundness and stability you want ? ”

“ That remains to be proved. But at least the theory promises fair.”

“ *Theory*, truly. Its promises are however hollow and deceitful ; as entirely so, as you will find the *reality*.”

“ Justice, justice ! dear Madam. How can you pronounce judgment on what you have never proved ? on what you have no opportunity of proving ? ”

"But thousands have ; more liberal, more pious, more wise and enlightened than I am. They have tried it, to their hearts' sorrow, and found it, so far from realizing its high sounding professions, but as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal."

"I should mistrust the evidence of apostates and enemies both," I replied, hastily. "On the one side there is always interest, and on the other prejudice."

"Apostates ! Is that the mildest term you can apply to those high-minded individuals, who having tested the system and found it a lie, have principle and fearlessness sufficient to dare the laugh of the world, by admitting they have been deceived ?"

"It is too knotty a point for me to decide," I replied, endeavouring to smile away the effects of my former hasty speech. "But tell me, on what grounds you have formed such a dreadful opinion of Roman Catholics ?"

"On none whatever. It is not Roman Catholics, as individuals, that I either judge, or reprehend, excepting where they have notoriously departed from the laws of God and uprightness. It is the *system*, which alike dupes the simple, and immolates the sincere, which before all mankind I would hold up to the detestation it deserves."

"And what is the system ? As far as I have investigated it, I confess it strikes me as being as near an approach to the *fit*, the perfect, and the beautiful, as God in His wisdom could have designed."

"Too perfect for *human* agency to work ; and too beautiful for human hands to touch, without becom-

ing impious. Oh, my dear and loved young friend ! be not deceived by a finely-dressed and cunningly-devised theory, which in its actual development will bitterly prove its own deceitfulness. Be wiser than to be heedlessly entangled in a gilded snare, which dazzles, but to blind, until it has enthralled beyond redemption. Trust the wise, the pious, the good, the Bible Christians of all ages ; who, intimately acquainted with the internal working of the whole structure, have, so far from discovering the adaptation and fitness you fancy you perceive, declared it to be ' the abominable thing,' and ceased not to cry out at the risk of chains, tortures and death ! " Come out of her my people, that ye partake not of her plagues ! "

" You never have, you never *can* have read both sides of the question ; and are therefore hardly competent to speak so infallibly. Nevertheless, can you certainly point me to the one *only* true Church, without fear of mistake or risk in the matter."

" I can ! To the universal company of believers in the sole efficacy of the merits and mercy of Jesus Christ, wherever found."

" But to say nothing of their variety and different degrees of belief ; a Church must be visible. And where were those to whom you attribute this belief, a few centuries ago ; before the Protestant Reformation in fact ? "

" This is a hackneyed question, and a favourite stumbling-block with Romanists. They were, however, to be found in those noble companies of Christians, who from time to time, like luminaries in the night of ages, appeared for a while illuminating the

dense gloom of the horizon, and then sank into obscurity, extinguished in blood. They were, the *Church was*, to be found, amongst the poor, persecuted, betrayed Waldenses and Albigenses, and numerous others of a like character, who, detesting the abominations of Rome, lifted up a warning voice against them, and for their pious hardihood, paid the penalty with their lives. And for numbers of these, for thousands of the elect of God's true Church, does the voice of vengeance cry from the ground to heaven, while the skirts of apostate Rome is dyed with their blood."

"There is much to be said on this side of the question too. But I will not enter into it here. Tenets inimical to the peace of kingdoms, and well-being of society, and occasionally treason, are attributed sometimes, to these vaunted martyrs. Truth perhaps lies in the medium. But, supposing Rome holds the one truth, and she only; will she not do right, in endeavouring at all hazards, to save souls from perdition, and prevent discord and division in the Church?"

"If you are going to advocate persecution on the ground of principle, I have done; for to dream of doing so, argues indeed the futility of attempting to reason. But, with regard to your remark, concerning the one truth: are you, can you, be so blinded as to believe, that all who possess faith as it is in Jesus, do not hold this truth in its fullest and most saving efficacy?"

"I will not argue the point with you, for I see we shall not agree. I may just however remark, that truth can be but *one*; and in the Protestant world

there are so many phases and developments of it, that at least it may leave a sceptic room to doubt."

"A sceptic would doubt of anything. But your argument is a sophistry. The question is, what is the *main* and *fundamental* truth, the truth *essential to salvation*? not its mere unimportant adjuncts, or, so to speak, the *foliage of the tree*. And this, there can be no rational doubt upon the mind of any Scripture reader, is emphatically, unequivocally, unalterably laid down, in this one simple passage of Holy writ, if no other remained on record—'*He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.*'"

I remember feeling thoughtful, but I made no farther reply; and soon after took up my book again.

Many and frequent were the conversations I held hereafter, of a same and similar tendency. They always ended, however, in the breach between us being widened. Able and Christian ministers of the gospel visited me, and from time to time discussed the subject with me, all to no purpose. Continual opposition only strengthened my enthusiasm. Persevering in a one-sided course of reading, or if I for a moment turned aside to an opposite course, doing it with a jaundiced eye, and a mind already predetermined; I ran rapidly on in the course on which I had entered. And, as I have said before, the semblance of the beautiful which rests upon the *theory*, serving as a powerful adjunct, I soon became completely captivated in will and understanding. True, from time to time proud thoughts of opposition,—so I termed them—would arise; and queries of a character partaking of the sceptical occur to my mind, as things

foreign to all preconceived ideas of truth and sound wisdom met my startled gaze. But, persuading myself of one thing at least, that if this system did not satisfy my fastidious enquiry, no other did, or would; I schooled myself into the belief, that in the *main* it must be right; and endeavoured to pass over trifles that did not meet my individual views, taking refuge under their own argument, that if the Church be infallible, all she teaches *must* be truth, which is indeed the inevitable consequence. And so bewildered was I, by the sophistry and subtility of the defenders of this dogma, that I firmly believed it to be true. Oh, what a foundation is supplied in it, for the maintenance of all kinds of inconsistencies and absurdities. What an easy entrance does it open, for the admission of false doctrine, errors, and fallacies of the grossest kind. What a funeral pall does it throw over all rights of conscience, freedom, truth. It is verily the masterpiece of human ingenuity, to hold the soul of man in bondage to his fellow-men. Rather, it is the royal stroke of the arch-enemy's grand policy, to foil with its own weapons, the sublime scheme of redeeming mercy, to sully at the fountain-head the stream of truth, and convert it into rank poison, and to crucify the Son of God afresh, with means extracted from the store-house of his own grace and bounty. And this, by rendering void his choicest benedictions, and under their guise, substituting strange doctrines, which insult his love, and ruin and destroy the soul. Is there any dogma so monstrous, which has not found a shelter within this stronghold? any fallacy so egregious,

any practice so derogatory to the Saviour's mediation and atonement, which has not been maintained, and upheld, by its advocates and partizans? Works of supererogation, the applicability of the overflowing merits of some saints to the necessities of others, when the Scripture declares, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags," and "There is *none* that doeth good, no, not one." The efficacy of purgatorial fires to cleanse away the stains of sin, when Christ has said, "His blood *alone* cleanses from *all* sin." The invocation of saints and angels, when we are plainly assured, "There is *one* Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." The worship—I can give it no milder name, from all I have *myself* known and witnessed—paid to the Mother of our Saviour according to the flesh, the trust, the overweening trust placed in her power and intercession, to the obscuring, if not the exclusion of the merits of Christ, so as to style her "Queen of Heaven," and "Refuge of Sinners," when again our Lord has said that "He alone is exalted a Prince and a Saviour." The doctrine of indulgences, which, arguing on the false premises, that all men's sins *must* be atoned for here, or hereafter, by suffering, professes to release the sinner from that suffering, so far as it is temporal or purgatorial, on the performance of certain stipulated external obligations, and acts of so called devotion and virtue. In fine, no extravagance or delusion,—and I might run on enumerating a long and dark list,—is too glaring or preposterous for this principle to shield or defend.

After the general examination of the edifice which

I had pronounced to promise so fair, these details also had to undergo investigation ; and here candour was obliged to acknowledge the fair seeming was not fully realized. The *authority* and *visibility* of the Church had been the first points of my enquiry, or in other phrase its infallibility ; and completely beguiled out of all judgment by its high-sounding, and *theoretically* well-substantiated claims to such an usurpation, ~~consoling~~ as it appeared in its results—I had bowed cheerfully to its assumptions. It was easy to perceive, according to the rules of common sense and fair argument, that on the truth of *this* hinged the whole question ; and that it and the system must stand or fall together. Receive this, and you must receive every thing else the Church teaches, how mysterious or repugnant soever. You cannot for one moment admit it, and reject any dogma she may propose to your belief, let the rules of right reason or the voice of the Scriptures repudiate it as they will. Therefore, as before said, when inconsistencies and difficulties perplexed me, or interrupted my peace, I sought deeper and deeper into the evidences and proofs of the truth of *this* dogma, and depended more on the security it promised to afford ; until at length, positively infatuated by my own ardour and *wish* to believe, every doubt, if not put to flight, was smothered, and the latest lingering beam of light well nigh extinguished. Yet I prayed!—prayed fervently too. But there was an element in my supplications which marred their efficacy. It was their spirit of self-will. I then was unaware of the fact. But so it was. I asked for light ; but if it

came in the form of a doubt or question, on the theory I so *desired* to embrace, I murmured, and refused to perceive its real character. If not rejecting it as temptation, to scare me from the truth, I would impetuously start from my studies, and despairingly for the time abandon belief in religion altogether; declaring, mentally, that if this was not true, I could believe no other. And more than once, twice, or thrice, was this the case. Often, and often, long intervals of meditation and mental struggling, were necessary to reconcile points at issue, and nought but the captivation of the *understanding* to this dogma of the Church's infallibility, at last sufficed to accomplish it. At such junctures, ever and anon came in to the rescue, the materials, which appealed most perhaps to my peculiar character,—beauty, fitness, and grandeur. There was everything here to awaken these emotions, even in minds where they were most dormant. To mine, they proved a powerful incentive, if not in some sort the mainspring to the course I was pursuing. I read the lives of saints and martyrs, and rapt in a lofty feeling of devotion and heroism, followed them to the desert, the torture, and the stake. I perused the annals of the Propagation of the Faith, with its more recent records of self-devotedness, sufferings, and martyrdom; and absorbed in glowing admiration, thought, that the faith which taught its followers to forsake all for its sake, *must* be the faith of Jesus. Ah, I could not penetrate beyond and beneath. The records of the formation of the different religious orders also, and all the instances of renunciation and piety which, from time to time,

have illustrated them, came in for their share of admiration, and I thought nothing in the Protestant world so pure, so generous, so sublime, had ever been known or aspired to. No other than the religion of truth *could* have instigated these things. Alas ! Alas ! obscurity had thrown its dun pall upon the mirror, and no friendly hand was nigh to hold the lamp of truth sufficiently near, to cause it to give forth a correct reflection. The richest genius of the artist had been employed to blend together the fairest colours, until they formed a combination which dazzled and bewildered the eye, to the utter exclusion of all the darker and more sombre tints which alone could have given truth and reality to the portrait. And, misled by the false brilliancy, allured by the illusive loveliness, the child of immature taste, and undisciplined enthusiasm, became fascinated with an unjust ideal, which never had, and could *not* have, any actual existence, except on canvass.

Another element yet there was at work, and no inconsiderable one. It was a feeling of strong sympathy for the persecuted, the humbled. The fine gold had become dim. The mighty had been cast down and trodden under foot. The once haughty and powerful, who had held in chains the necks of sovereigns, and bowed the known universe to its sway, had been made to come and lick the dust off the feet of those it had subjugated. The beauty and majesty of past centuries, as seen and admired through their mystic medium, had vanished for ever, crushed by the iron hand of fanaticism, and the imperiousness of pride and power. Some sternness—perhaps wrong,

there had been, but I paused not to enquire, whether the *cause* justified the *effect*, or whether the power which had *itself* so ferociously and relentlessly persecuted, required, not in its turn, some harsh measures for its suppression. These enquiries would have drawn aside too rudely a glittering veil, which pleased the eye, and kept remote all more dissonant objects of contemplation. So I walked on, to the future, to the *realities* which awaited me there.

CHAPTER III.

Imagination held the reins, and its illusions shed,
O'er judgment, reason, light, and truth, till *faith* grew dim and
dead. MS.

THOUGHT so absorbing and constant, with its attendant solicitude, soon began to shew its effects in my frame ; and my altered looks awoke the concern and anxiety of my friends. In some degree aware of my perplexity of mind, though not of its full extent, and desirous if possible to divert me from the cause of it, as well as to benefit me physically, they proposed a visit to the house of a friend in an adjoining county. With a heart full of pleasurable anticipation I heard the arrangement ; for, unknown to any one but myself, a daughter of the family to which I was going, and my most particular friend, had imbibed similar sentiments on the subject of Romanism, to my own ; and we had frequently corresponded privately on the subject. I was aware too, that the young lady was acquainted with a priest of that religion, a man somewhat distinguished for ability ; and as I had never spoken to a Romanist in my life, and had often wished to do so, it was with no slight emotion of satisfaction I contemplated the opportunity that might now

be afforded me. The distance I had to travel was somewhat long, and had to be performed by coach ; and to fortify myself against *ennui*, I carried with me a controversial work to peruse. The subject was just then an all-absorbing one, and every object, almost every incident in life, became in some manner associated with it in my thoughts. My only travelling companion was a young lady ; and following the usual train of reflection, I began to speculate on the probably wide remove of her religious sentiments from my own. And with a view of sounding her on the subject, the first approach to acquaintance was made in the form of a question, viz. : If she could inform me the direction of the new convent,—there having been one recently erected in the neighbourhood.

“ It is quite at the other end of the town,” she replied ; “ We cannot see it at all in this direction.” Then noticing my somewhat eager manner, she added, “ I witnessed a profession there a week or two ago.”

“ Indeed ; and what impression did it make ? Do you think if we could look into the hearts of the votaries, a few years later, we should see no regrets, no unavailing repentance ? ”

“ Regrets ! repentance ! Oh ! no, no. Their lot is too happy, too blessed.”

My heart leaped a response to the tone of enthusiasm with which this was uttered. And I hastily enquired, “ Are you a Catholic ? ”

“ I am.” Involuntarily the next moment, the words had escaped my lips. “ So am I, at least in sentiment.”

“ In sentiment? Explain yourself.”

“ That I have been long a Catholic in conviction. But circumstances prevent my professing to be so openly.” Then followed a long explanation of my peculiar situation, of the struggles of my mind, of the opposition of friends, and the seeming impossibility of my being able for some time to come—if ever—to manifest my belief to the world. Brought up a zealous Catholic, even to entertaining their strictest tenets, the young lady sought by every means in her power to encourage me to an onward path; endeavouring to lessen my dread of the obstacles which beset me, and to appeal to my enthusiasm by a representation of the superior advantages and attractions of the faith she professed, and its ultimate blessings and rewards. The conversation deepened each moment in interest; and proceeded with slight intermission, until we arrived at the end of our journey, which to me had appeared too short for the purpose. It proved that the stranger was about to visit the very priest I had been so desirous to converse with; and the *extent* of my feelings were better manifested by the promise which I extorted from my companion, than they could have been in any other way, viz., that she would *not* mention to him the conversation that had passed between us. Longing to meet him, I yet feared to do so; and wishing with all the fervency of which I was capable, that he understood the state of my mind, I yet trembled at the thought of laying it open to him. Thus we parted with every mutual good wish, and hoping soon to meet again. With a mind almost absorbingly pre-

occupied, I proceeded to my friends : and when alone with the daughter alluded to, who had imbibed similar ideas, was not long in detailing the incident to her, and pouring into her sympathizing ear all my hopes, and fears, and feelings. Earnestly we talked to a late hour in the night, but my friend had not proceeded so far as I had done in her unwise course, and ever and anon there were points of variance. Each and all of these, however, I combatted with heart and soul, as though by the mere energy of my enthusiasm, I would bear down all opposition ; and my earnest, and not unfrequently impassioned manner, had its effect on the milder and less resolute character of my friend. And the late " good night," when at length it was uttered, witnessed a mutual engagement to go to the new Roman Catholic Church on the coming Sabbath, and after that to pay a visit to the priest.

The Sabbath came—though to me at least it seemed long in doing so—and witnessed the fulfilment of the pledge. The ceremony—as it chanced—was a peculiarly attractive one ; and to me, who had been but twice before to a Romish place of worship in my life—and that of quite the plainest kind—had a deep and unaccountable interest. It was a procession of a guild,* (in the full dress, and wearing the badges of the confraternity) around the church, from the sacristy to the altar. The edifice was itself a new

* A Guild is an association of men and women for objects of mutual good will and charity. They are bound by special obligations to assist and minister to each other's necessities, and to say certain prayers.

one, and built in the lately-revived, antique style, which has such an impressive and imposing appearance. In short, it was one of Pugin's *chef-d'œuvres*, and that is saying all for it that can be said. The whole scene to me was as novel as inspiring; and my not quite understanding the meaning of any part of it, perhaps if any thing rendered it more so. The white habits and flowing veils of the sisters, contrasted by the black, monkish costume of the brothers, as headed by the pale intellectual-looking priest, they slowly swept around the church, revived many a glowing imagination of olden time. And when at last, pausing, they all knelt before the altar, and the deep rich voice of the priest intoned one of the church's anthems, which was immediately taken up by the effective and well-arranged choir, the illusion was at its height; and with a bounding heart and flushed cheek, I mentally exclaimed, "Surely this is no other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven." The service concluded, we called upon the priest, and here I again encountered the companion of my journey. The *one* subject soon became the engrossing topic; and with more composure and candour than I had thought I could command, by degrees I laid open to the ecclesiastic the state of my mind and feelings. As occasion seemed to require, he encouraged, persuaded and argued; though, on the whole, he was much more silent than I expected. This, however, as might have been foreseen, instead of lessening, only increased the interest I felt; and with a mind enchained now beyond the power of liberation, I left him, with the promise of

another visit as early as convenient at his house. It was paid, and many an after-one too : repaid again by an occasional one from the priest himself, at that of my friends,—they being people of the liberal school, who did not object to mix with all denominations. After awhile, however, even they began to grow uneasy, as they perceived in what the affair was likely to terminate ; dreading on their own account, the indignation of my relatives. What had before existed but as an idea, a theory in my mind, had now received the impetus which must infallibly transform it into a living practical principle. The hour of indecision, of sentimental speculation, had passed away for ever ; and the moment for action arrived. I felt now there was no pause : I must work. Wasted time reproached me : coward fears looked me contemptuously in the face ; and as if each other motive was insufficient, a voice seemed to speak my soul in peril. Hesitation was impossible ; even delay out of the question. Remorse for the past awoke resolution for the future ; and instant action was the result. Nor was it resolution only, to embrace, at any hazard, what I believed to be truth, *outwardly*. There was also *practical* principle involved in it. I meant not only to profess, but act. This religion appeared eminently one of *deed* and *work* : something tangible, influencing the conduct, and mixing itself up with the affairs of every-day life. It was a performance of *duties*, to which was promised the recompense of a peaceful conscience, and the favour of heaven. Oh how reasonable it seemed, how adapted to the condition of

fallen, but *proud* human nature. By its *own efforts* to fulfil the law of God, and *merit* His grace and benediction ; no wonder that it beguiles so many possessed of even the loftiest intellect and largest amount of human learning. For the greater man's elevation in these regards, the farther is he often removed from the "folly of the cross," and child-like simplicity of the gospel. And *practically* must he be convinced of the *impracticability* of human merit, often too at the expense of much suffering, before he can be brought to admit its utter fallacy, and to submit to the easy but humiliating terms of salvation. Any experience of this nature, as yet, I had never had ; and with all the ardour of unenlightened understanding, I determined on following what appeared so exactly to meet my erring nature's wants. Pleasing too was the reaction upon my mind of possessing a defined and settled faith, after my long course of indecision and uncertainty. Here I flattered myself all harassing doubts and embarrassing speculation must for ever terminate, and assured peace be secured to me. And as extremes are, in the phrase of the old adage, said to meet, I ran from one opposite, to the utmost point of the other ; and even felt a *pleasure* in submitting my mind and will to the voluntary bondage in which I had enslaved them. Alas ! the galling nature of the fetters had yet to be proved, the crushing weight of the iron despotism to be felt and writhed under. Blinded however to inevitable consequences, as well as actual facts, both of which a *candid* intelligence might have pointed out to me, and which have since been as clearly, as bitterly developed ; I pursued my

determined course as unwaveringly, as disregardful of the suffering it was likely to entail upon me. I was not then aware of it, but the course of acting which *appeared* to me the result of a conviction of duty, from which there was no appeal, was *in fact* partly the consequence of extraneous influences, and in much, assisted to its consummation, by their agency alone. These I have endeavoured to point out as I have traced my progress. But, it may be added, that personal intercourse with the objects of my interest and sympathy, was, at this crisis, a most powerful adjunct to their effectiveness, if any could have been needed. However this may be, I was so completely taken captive, that it needed but little persuasion on the part of my clerical acquaintance, to induce me to consent to become a Roman Catholic before my return home. Fully aware of the opposition that would await me there, so soon as my purpose should be known, I was desirous to place myself beyond the reach of its influence, by taking the final step, previous to encountering it; and I even fixed a time to pay a visit of some days to the priest, with a view to accomplishing my design. By some means, however, probably through the medium of my friends, who, doubtless, had their own reasons for dreading its fulfilment while I was under their roof, my relations became aware of my intention; and the very day antecedent to its execution, I received a peremptory command to return home immediately. Had I consulted my own inclinations on the point, I should probably have been inclined to disobey. But respect for the wishes of those under whose protection I was residing, and

who strongly urged my compliance, forbade me to think of doing so. Reluctantly, therefore, I was compelled to depart, still in name a Protestant ; but I did not do so without a binding promise given, that on my return home, I would immediately seek an interview with the priest of the town in which I resided, and lay open to him the state of my mind. My Reverend friend also gave me a letter of introduction to the Superieure of the Convent, which had been the object of my curiosity on my journey thither ; and likewise one to the Dean of one of the principal Catholic Colleges, which lay in my route. Both of these introductions, and the visits consequent upon them to the two establishments, had a lasting influence on my mind. The dignified and edifying demeanour of the interesting Nun, who showed me the Convent—herself a convert, and capable of entering into my feelings—the retired loveliness of the situation, the beauty of the building, and imposing quiet of the exquisite little chapel and adjoining cloister, excited to passionate admiration the already predisposed mind ; and the subsequent interviews with the polished dignitaries of the church to whom I was introduced at the College, and again at the Bishop's house, completed the spell. So that on my return to the hotel, where I was to pass the night, pleasurable excitement alone entirely precluded all possibility of repose. And after many vain attempts to induce it, during the first hours of darkness, I rose with the early dawn of the advanced summer morning, to vent my emotions in an effort at poetic eulogy. The next day saw my return home, with feelings

wound up to the highest pitch of admiration, and resolved at any self-sacrifice, even that of friends and home, to ensure to myself participation in such rich and novel benedictions.

The meeting with my friends was mutually kind, but sorrowful. My still pale looks, as well perhaps as a motive of policy, prevented them from making any special allusion to the subject. Still there was a reserve, a consciousness on both sides, which imposed a somewhat painful restraint. My sister was the only one to whom I felt at liberty even to allude to the subject. From her I learnt the extreme grief of my parents and relatives, and the probable barrier it would raise to future kindly intercourse and happiness. I was not prepared to the full extent for all I was now made acquainted with, nor the utter impossibility—as it seemed—of my father ever becoming reconciled. But it did not shake my resolve. It was all of no avail. My heart misgave me at the struggle I saw about to commence ; my gaze almost faltered as it encountered the prospect before me ; my bosom heaved with agitated and painful emotions, as I felt the sacrifice I was called upon to make, and the isolated position in which I must henceforth stand. The conflict was terrible, overmastering for the hour, but the victory was finally won by *enthusiasm*.

CHAPTER IV.

Such thoughts as sear the soul, such words as burn,
Each web unhallowed, that vain thought has weav'd,
Things which to gall one's very being turn,
All guilt the heart has dreamed, the mind conceiv'd :
All—all must be recorded, uttered, told,
What tongue so daring grown,—so over bold ?

And woman, woman, lowly must *thow* bow,
Forget thy sex, thy nature, and thy pride :
And to a man, a mortal man avow,
What deepest, bitterest grief would die to hide.
Life has no keener pang, no sharper pain
And death to find one would but strive in vain.

MS.

THE promise given to my clerical acquaintance was not long in being fulfilled. Three days from the date of my return, with a trembling hand and faltering heart, I knocked at the door of the Priest who resided in my native city. He was a Jesuit, and his easy and affable address won my regards at first sight. The name of the reverend gentleman from whom I brought a message was sufficient passport to his kindness ; and by his apparent warmth and interest of manner, placing me quite at my ease, I again found myself instinctively entering into my

feelings and experience, with a fulness and candour I could hardly have anticipated. Judiciously suiting his plan of treatment to the tone of mind of his visitor, reasoning when reasoning was needed, and encouraging and strengthening where courage and strength were required, the result of the visit proved highly satisfactory; and it was followed by many a subsequent one, for the purpose of receiving fuller instructions as to the nature and doctrines of the faith I sought to embrace. Merely elemental knowledge however, I was already well skilled in; and on the Priest (whom I shall call Father Eustace) testifying his pleasure and surprise at the extent of this, my vanity was highly gratified. Trivial however, as were many of the incidents which tended to confirm the illusion, and puerile as was their character, higher elements certainly mingled to redeem, and in some sort sanctify the whole. The stress Father Eustace laid on prayer for courage, and light, and guidance, pleased me most of all, and zealously I put in practice his oft-repeated injunction on that head. At the time, I believed my petitions perfectly sincere, and consequently they were not without their effect in strengthening my resolve and convictions. I perceived not that they were offered with an already predetermined mind, if not in absolute wilfulness. Such as they were, however, they remained recorded, to be answered, in how unlooked-for a manner, at a future day. I determined to become a Roman Catholic. Evangelical ministers sought to dissuade by the light of sound argument, and the evidence of historic testimony. My friends remonstrated, pleaded,

threatened,—all in vain. My mother shed heartfelt and bitter tears,—still uselessly. I wept too. The founts of feeling lavished their treasures copiously, and seemed unlocked never again to close. My heart died within me, but my *will* was unchanged. Firmly impressed with the idea that I was suffering for *God* and his truth, no merely human pangs could shake my resolution. Nay, the more refined and lacerating they were, the more they increased the value of my insignificant offering. Some shade of the martyr spirit coloured my mind, and at moments I could ask but to *suffer* for God. Again, when *feeling* seemed upon the point of becoming victorious, the dogma of my new creed, that suffering can atone for sin, acted as a counterpoise, by persuading me that I had now an opportunity of offering to my Maker some slight atonement for the faults and follies of my past life. Seeing that every immediate effort was unavailing, and also how much my health was suffering from the struggle I was undergoing, my friends again sent me from home to visit some Protestant relatives, where there was no possibility of coming within the reach of Roman Catholic influence. Here every thing was opposed to my sentiments, and delicacy as well as propriety forbade me to obtrude them. The restraint however which I was obliged to impose upon myself, by causing the subject to take deeper hold on my mind and imagination, only increased the interest I felt; and a constant correspondence kept up with Father Eustace, to whom I revealed all my pent-up emotions, and who appeared to my excited mind the only friend and sympathizer

I had, kept it still on the increase, even had it been in danger of faltering. I returned home therefore to consummate my now unalterable purpose, having, as I thought, braved the keenest shafts of opposition. The initiatory forms gone through, I received baptism ; and even despite my willingness to receive any proposition however startling or strange, as I came to study the rite, it was in vain to attempt to smother the questions and comments which arose in my mind, as to the utility and even significance of some of the ceremonies usually employed.* It was not for me

* As I had been baptized in the Protestant Faith when an infant, there rested some doubt on the validity of the Sacrament in my regard ; consequently I only received what is called conditional baptism ; in which *all* the ceremonies are not gone through. I had them however—with the significance attached to each—given me to study, and at the same time also, saw a child baptized, in which case the whole were employed. I here give them ; of their character let the reader judge.

When an individual is presented for baptism, the Priest formally enquires of him—or if an infant, of his sponsors—what he demands of the Church ; and telling him the conditions on which baptism will be granted, he proceeds to prepare him for it as follows :

He first breathes upon him, and says, “ Depart from him, thou unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost the Comforter.” He then makes the sign of the cross upon his forehead, and upon his breast ; upon the forehead, to shew that we should never be ashamed of the Cross of Christ, and on the breast, to intimate the love we should bear to Him. He next puts a little *blessed salt* into the person’s mouth, saying, “ Receive the salt of wisdom, may it be unto thee a *propitiation to life everlasting*.” After this, he proceeds to the *exorcisms*, by which, and making the sign of the cross frequently on the person of the individual, he *commands* the Devil to depart from his soul, and *orders* him to give place to the Holy Ghost, who now comes to take possession of him. He then introduces him to the baptismal font, saying, “ Enter into the Church of God, that thou mayst have part with Christ unto life

to reason on such trifles however, or on any position *abstractedly*. If the Church was infallible, *all* she taught, from the highest article of faith, to the most insignificant detail, was alike worthy of the credence and veneration of her docile children. So I silenced my foolish quibbling, and went on to the test of a convert's fervour and sincerity—confession. And here was assuredly a fresh, and not so easily vanquished source of pain and disquiet. The theory had appeared just fair and rational, but the *reality* was terrible.

everlasting." Then he recites the Apostle's Creed, and our Lord's Prayer. He now repeats another exorcism, and at the end of it touches the ear and nostrils of the person to be baptized with his *spittle*, saying, "Ephphatha, that is, be thou opened, into an odour of sweetness, but be thou put to flight, O Devil, for the judgment of God will be at hand." Then commences the action of baptism; for these are but the preparatory ceremonies. And now the Priest anoints the recipient with holy oil, on the breast, and between the shoulders, making upon each the sign of the cross, and saying, "I anoint thee with the oil of salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord, *that thou mayest have life everlasting.*" He then questions him or his sponsors, as to his faith, willingness to be baptized, &c. and then administers the sacrament, by pouring a mixture of consecrated water, oil, and chrism, upon his head, saying at the same time, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Immediately after this the head is anointed with holy chrism, and a white garment or cloth placed upon the person, and the whole concludes by a lighted torch being put into the hand, as an emblem of the light of good example; while the Priest, exhorting him to keep his baptism without reproof, and obey the commands of God, gives him leave to depart in peace. These ceremonies I have correctly given, with as far as possible, the meaning attached to each; so that I cannot be charged I think, with an unfair attempt to ridicule. I may however add, that the words accompanying them, which I have given in English, are repeated by the Priest in Latin, so that a person must be well instructed fully to comprehend them.

Divested for the public gaze of its darkest ingredients, and dressed up in false and meretricious hues of truth and purity, it *seems* but a dogma calculated to exert a beneficial influence upon mankind, and prove a source of morality and usefulness. But, oh ! like all ideals, how unlike the actual. It was a dark page in my experience, and one I cannot dwell upon. But I was strangely startled, utterly confounded : under other circumstances, nay a few months before, it would have put to rest my longings after Catholicism for ever. But the mantle of evening had already cast its shadowy folds around me, and they were fast enveloping me in darkness as of midnight. The purity of mind and delicacy in which I had been educated, ill prepared me for what I had here to encounter ; and my own sincerity and dread of committing a sacrilege, by magnifying circumstances the most trifling into sins of vast account, occasioned the augmentation rather than lessened the suffering and annoyance. Every delicate and better feeling, prevents full delineation here. Nor am I blaming individuals ; it is the *system* which is at fault. A system which teaches that things which degraded humanity must blush, in the presence of *Heaven* and *its angels*, even at the *remembrance* of, should be laid open, dwelt upon, and exposed in detail, to the sullied ears of a *corrupt* and fallen fellow-mortal ; who, of like passions with the penitent at his feet, is thereby exposed to temptations the most dark and dangerous. But what shall we say of woman ! Draw a veil,—oh ! purity, modesty, and every feminine feeling,—a veil dark as oblivion, over the sad outrages too often

committed against thee. Oh! there are things too strange for record, truths too pungent for easy acquiescence; facts too startling, and at the same time too delicately intricate to admit of public portrayal, or meet the popular gaze. But the cheek can blush in secret at the true images of memory's evoking, and the outraged mind shrink back in horror at the recollection of the dark realities which have oppressed and overwhelmed it. I appeal to converts, to converts of the gentler sex, and ask them, fearlessly ask them, what was the *first* impression on their minds and feelings, when some of the truths of the confessional struck home? I ask not the impure, the already defiled,—for to such it is sadly susceptible of being made even a darker source of abuse and shame—but I appeal to the delicate and high-minded, to the pure in heart and sentiment: was not your *first* impression one of dread and bewilderment almost stunning, to be followed by a sense of humiliation and degradation, not easily to be defined or supported? Yet even here sophistry comes in to the rescue, and the enfeebled mind, driven from every other resource, asks itself whether its *previous* ideas may not have been the erroneous ones, and the *present* but truth, in an unpalatable shape. Whether, in fine—as the advocates of the dogma love to urge—there is most shame in the commission, or confession of guilt? Until, as effectually mystified as is needful for the purpose, at length the poor votaries of the doctrine of the availableness of suffering to purge away guilt, include *this* too, (even reconciled to its very bitterness) as one of the most efficacious

methods in the prescribed list of satisfactions. How strange are the extremes of folly to which the human heart will stoop, how abject the humiliation to which it will submit ! No more indelible and convincing mark of its fall from original greatness could have been devised than is thus supplied.

By such puerile modes of reasoning, I did my best to degrade my mind to the necessary level; and though never wholly successful, contrived after a time to blunt the edge of its susceptibility, in some slight degree. My palpable surprise, and dread also, I believe, shielded me from much after the *first* trial, at least for some time, and also my subsequently scrupulous care, that there should be no shadow of *excuse*, for the most indirect approach to what had so distressed me. But my first impression I could never obliterate, and the recollection even, at any hour or moment, however otherwise happily employed, would involuntarily cause a thrill of pain, and cast a shade over my mind. The events of a long life could, I hardly think, lessen the vividness of the memory of that time; though subsequent experience has thrown even that far into the back ground. As I write, it even now rushes back upon me fresh as then, and I tremble at the abyss on which I have stood. Things, the meaning of which I did not understand, were then brought before me, and my tears of contrition supplanted by the burning blush of wounded delicacy. One circumstance I well recal, which had occurred in early youth, and my scrupulous conscience persuaded me I was obliged to name it, though I never attached any large amount of sin to its commission, if indeed I

fully comprehended its meaning. But the questioning which it elicited, and the ideas supplied by it, lacerated my feelings to such an extent, that forgetting all respect for my confessor, and careless even at the moment, whether I received absolution or not, I hastily exclaimed, "I cannot say a word more!" while the thought rushed into my mind;—"All is true that their enemies say of them." Here however prudence dictated to my questioner to push the matter no farther; and the immediately kind and even respectful tone he assumed, went far towards effacing an impression so injurious. On rising from my knees, when I should have gladly fled to any distance rather than have encountered his gaze; he addressed me in the most familiar manner, on indifferent subjects, and detained me some time in talking. What share I took in the conversation I never knew. All that I remember was my confusion. But the conclusion was, my acceptance of an invitation to breakfast with him the next morning; which I was too embarrassed to refuse. I went, and to my annoyance found him *alone*; and the reader may judge of my feelings. The *tendency* is apparent—the familiarization of the mind, under the most insidious disguise, with shame and impurity. Banishing, however, as far as possible every deleterious thought, I endeavoured to feel grateful for what I deemed his kindness, and schooled my heart to believe that all was right, at least on my part; while the determination I made, never to give any occasion for a repetition of the annoyance, communicated a sensation of great relief. The preparation too for communion, which occupied

some time, and subsequently the thanksgiving also, now very much absorbed my mind. It was a subject on which I felt enthusiastically, and every lower idea seemed almost profanation. Present and palpable objects grew insignificant in my estimation, and the mystery of the real presence of the Saviour in the sacrament, and the holiness of heart and life which ought to distinguish those admitted to such close union with Him, at length completely engrossed me.

It seemed for the time being, as though I dwelt within the tabernacle of the Most High. "God with us," was for ever the prevailing thought; and proceeding on the false supposition of man's power, to offer a sacrifice acceptable to his Maker, in his own works and efforts, I kept up a most wearisome pressure upon my attention, in order to sustain my mind at the required height of devotion: or, as my Prayer-book taught me, to "receive and entertain *worthily* so great a guest." The thought too of having it in my power to receive as often as my fervour and inclination dictated, so adorable a gift, was one of unspeakable gratulation and thankfulness; and determining to avail myself of the privilege as frequently as possible, nearly all my time became by degrees employed, either in acts of preparation, or thanksgiving. I frequented the early morning mass, and often remained for hours on my knees, repeating forms of prayer, or other devotions, being never happier than when so engaged. As might have been expected, this often produced both mental and bodily fatigue. But to such human emotions I had but one reply, *atonement* for past sin, and the *worthy* reception of our Lord

and Saviour. Seeking to perfect myself, I had already lost sight of the righteousness of Christ ; and perceiving not, as yet, the exacting and unsatisfactory nature of the toil I had commenced, I proceeded with a fervour which led me on to the undesirable and painful consequences detailed in a former narrative.* True, from time to time many incidents occurred, which for the moment checked my ardour, if not relaxed my enthusiasm ; and led me to pause, hesitate, and often question. But such incidents were ever destined to work to an opposite consummation, than at first sight appeared probable : for every doubt, the infallibility of the Church was a remedy ; and where this came into operation reason ended : so that, to have argued against authority so conclusive and overpowering, was to have been guilty of a sin needing repentance, and as such, to be carefully eschewed in future. Thus, after each struggle the thralldom became more effectual, until things that the *mind* and *intellect* could not embrace, were received by the *will*, in compliance with the exactions of this arbitrary tribunal.

One evening, about six weeks after I became a Roman Catholic ; while waiting in the Sacristy to go to confession, a young girl entered, who was about to be received into the Church. She had been a gay character, and as I knew, as well as the sequel also abundantly proved, was by no means at present, as consistent as she ought to be. She was going to be baptized, and Father Eustace on his entrance, requested me to remain and witness the ceremony.

* "Five years a Catholic."

This I did, though certainly with some slight prejudice against the recipient of the sacrament, from what I knew of her previous history. The rite concluded, the priest said a few words of advice and congratulation. She had, it seemed, never been baptized before; so that it was unconditional baptism which had been administered, which, putting aside the necessity of confession, was supposed at once to regenerate her nature, and blot out all sin hitherto actually committed. Placing his hand on her head in benediction, Father Eustace told her the nature of the graces she had received, and pronounced her, if she were *then* to die, fit for heaven. How I started: I knew from indisputable facts, even recent ones, the girl's general character, and how very unlikely it was such a change could have been so suddenly wrought as would justify the assertion. The awfulness of the delusion smote upon me in all its actual force; the *lie* seemed so plain and palpable, that it glared forth mockingly; the utter fallacy and impiety of such a dogma could not but stand out in meridian clearness, with all its blasphemous consequences; and for a brief space I struggled, and almost fell before the strength of my conscience's remonstrance. Again, however, sophistry did its work, and the infallibility of the Church came in to its own defence. I made an act of contrition, another of faith, and became more quiescently abandoned to the influences around me than ever. To illustrate the value which those who are born and bred Roman Catholics attach to this dogma, and how fearfully they are in danger of putting the Church in the place of the Saviour, listen

to the following:—Not long after the baptism just narrated, I had an introduction to two young Catholic ladies, who were warm, as all my new acquaintances were, in their congratulations, on my having had the grace of election to the *true faith*. I thanked them, and incidentally spoke of my friends, their different sentiments and consequent distress; when one of them in the ardour of her feelings exclaimed, after commenting on the deluded and unsafe state of Protestants, and the contrary security and assurance of Roman Catholics, “I would rather be a *bad* Catholic, so that I had been born and baptized one, than a good Protestant.”

“Oh! would you?” responded I, with undisguised surprise in my tone.

“I would indeed,” was the reply, “for then, at least, there would be hope in my case.”

A thoughtful smile was the only answer.

CHAPTER V.

Hail, Mary ! hope of Christians ! queen of Heav'n,
Homage supreme to you, and power be giv'n.
Christ by His death, redeem'd the world 'tis true,
But this redemption must be sought through *you* :
Though by his blood and groans, on Calvary bought,
Without *your* mediation, it is nought :
Though He be God, and you but mortal frail,
Your aid must make the holocaust avail.
Oh ! awful blasphemy ! Oh ! doctrine dread !
Whither have light, and truth, and reason fled ?

MS.

As my intimacy with Catholics increased, so did my surprize at many things that met my view increase also. Though the preponderating nature of the influences at work within and without me, were sufficient to prevent the smallest outward demonstration ; or even internal excitement of a more grave or lasting character than would be produced by the obstruction, here and there, of a few rude stones, to the onward course of a rapid and powerful current. I viewed the system still in the poetic light my enthusiasm and fervour loved best to behold it ; as a sublime and comprehensive *whole*, more in consonance with all man's ideas of the perfect and the true,

than any other system upon earth. And as such, all minor points of doubt and variance were passed by as too insignificant for serious consideration ; while all fainter and more sombre tints were blended with, and fused into, the general harmony. Starting with this one leading point of belief, and heedless of how my predispositions influenced this belief, I clung to it with the tenacity with which an inexperienced child will cling to a showy or glittering toy, not from its intrinsic worth, but simply because it pleases best the eye, and gives a larger amount of pleasure to the gaze. Yet, ever and anon, as the gilding showed more tarnished, or a crevice here, and a discrepancy yonder, manifested the brittle and spurious nature of the material of which it was composed, a feeling of annoyance, of chagrin and mortification, rather than any more clearly defined feeling, would intrude at being obliged to admit a conviction so disappointing and injurious.

I had been educated in the school of pure and strict evangelical religion. The examples before me from childhood had been devout and edifying. All my early ideas had been of a grave and serious character, and calculated to impress upon my mind the importance of the soul and its salvation. Pure faith in the sole efficacy of Christ's atonement, had been the corner-stone of my creed. Every thought injurious to this had been repudiated as derogatory to the Saviour, to his merits and sacrifice. That He was the one Mediator between God and man, was also another of its most essential elements. That *lost man could merit, or redeemed man intercede*, had

therefore been some of the greatest difficulties in my adoption of the Romish faith. But strange as had appeared the theory, the thing itself was stranger still. To the former I had become reconciled, and to the latter also tried to be, so earnestly, that I fancied I had succeeded. Yet, ever and anon, jutting up the rude stone, impeding for the hour the onward course of the current, and some new form or shape of blasphemy *—I can call it now, viewed in the clear light of God's simple truth, by no milder term—would shock and bewilder the infatuated mind ; and send even through its cave-like gloom, (shut out and guarded as it was at every aperture by the briars and brambles with which it was overgrown) a ray of light which, had it been permitted to permeate, must have dispelled the darkness, and revealed the disorder and chaos of the entire interior. The Litany of the blessed Virgin was the first thing that had produced serious difficulty. But this had been explained away and set forth as being only symbolical, and the language of Scripture, until I had learned to repeat it without scruple : and even in an evil hour put pen to paper to defend it ; persuading myself, that by multiplying titles of grace and honour to the Mother, according to the flesh, and paying her unbounded homage and veneration, I was, in fact, *exalting* the *uncreated* dignity of the Son ; as if any thing *could* be added to the greatness of Him, who is " *God*, blessed

* Such as begging God to *pardon all our sins*, and *defend us from all adversity*, through the *merits* and intercession of this or that saint ; and numberless other impious styles of invocation, with which the Romish Missal and Prayer Books abound : which are too diffuse to mention here.

for evermore." Again, the honour paid to the saints was in no way derogatory to that due to Christ, inasmuch as it was so far inferior; nor could their mediation injure his, because it was *with* Him they were asked to mediate: as if all classes of minds, and degrees of intelligence, could vividly appreciate under every circumstance, such subtle marks of distinction, and were competent on all occasions, invariably to draw such fine lines of demarcation. This may be *asserted*, but the *proof* is to the contrary. The *practice* is, I fearlessly affirm, in too many instances, widely different; and, however words and forms may declare the reverse, the honour paid to the saints, and the trust placed in the efficacy of their intercession, often exceeds that given to our blessed Lord himself. And with regard to their intercession: can the eternal Love which proved its infinitude and vastness by *dying* for man, require prompting to acts of beneficence, or deeds of mercy, by the supplications of those whom *He Himself* has saved? Putting aside the question of the Omnipresence of created intelligences (though this is a grave difficulty, and one never yet satisfactorily overcome), can they be *nearer*, more willing, more prompt, and more efficacious to aid, than the great One, ever present, all-merciful, all-loving, and all-powerful? Can the being framed, exceed in its nature and attributes the perfections of the Framer? or the charity of the creature, surpass his who "despiseth not the *sighing* of a contrite heart?" And yet so this doctrine would seem to inculcate; so in fact it does, to a large extent. The effect is to interpose an inferior agency between the

soul and God, giving to that agency a prominence in the attributes of goodness, willingness, and compassion, which in its *practical* working, tends to darken and obscure the perfections of the Divine Being, and to place the Saviour at an immeasurable distance from the soul, representing Him, in effect, as too great and far off to be approached otherwise, than through a host of lesser Mediators, who, by their good will and supplications, must move Him to the exercise of his compassion. No wonder that views so harsh should beget the idea of the necessity of penances, and austere bodily inflictions; or even inspire the thought, that votive sublunary gifts and offerings are another grand means to the favour of such an *earthly* deity. The impiety of the doctrine is its own condemnation, and the absurdity refutes itself. The *extremes* of the fallacy, however, I had not *yet* seen; either in *theory*, as depicted in some of their books of devotion, or in their actual working tendency. And before I had done either, while a skilful glazing was on the picture, and the merely attractive points alone were brought out into observation, I had, as previously stated, written in defence of this, as well as most of the other doctrines of the Church.

Later, that work was the subject of sincere sorrow, but sorrow, alas! unavailing. It was the product of enthusiasm, inexperience, and want of mature knowledge; and as fallacious in argument as crude in style and form. But such as it was, it unfortunately went forth to the world, and is beyond recal. The only course therefore left open to the writer, is to endeavour to nullify its effects, in so far as they may have

been injurious, by the consistent advocacy henceforth of the pure and holy doctrines, heretofore so heedlessly attempted to be injured. But enough : pursue we our narrative. The most *palpable* appeal as yet made to my credulity, occurred about this time in connection with this very doctrine, the Invocation of other Mediators than Christ. I paid a visit to a young lady who had been recently introduced to me, and while with her was presented with a medal, called "The medal of the Immaculate Conception," the wearing of which, accompanied with certain prayers and conditions, was to be a channel for conveying great graces and privileges to the soul. On one side were two hearts engraved, both pierced, representing those of Jesus and his Mother, surmounted by the letter M, which was again surmounted by a cross. On the reverse side, was a full-length figure of the blessed Virgin, from whose hands issued something like rays of glory, but which were intended to be emblematical of the treasures she holds, ready to dispense to her suppliant children. Her feet trod on a serpent. Is not this giving Christ's glory to a mortal ? And round the whole was inscribed the words, "Oh, Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us, who have recourse to thee." A miracle is connected with the origin and first issue of this medal ; the exact particulars of which are too lengthy to detail here. But the substance is as follows. The blessed Virgin herself appeared to a nun in a certain convent, on one or two specified occasions, ordering this medal to be struck, and distributed amongst the faithful, and affixing to its use certain obligations,

which, if duly performed, should ensure special grace and favour at her hands. A number of miracles, of an astounding character, are reported to have occurred in connexion with it, which, if *they be not true*, prove *their origin* indisputably ; all having the tendency to exalt the power, and as they express it, glory of Mary, and in effect place her on the throne of her Son Himself. The wonders narrated, are too strange and numerous to come within the design or limits of this volume. But any one who desires to see a more detailed account of them, may find it in a book, published under the title of, "The Arch-Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the Conversion of Sinners." * This gives an account of the singular spread of the Confraternity, and the miracles which have been wrought in answer to the prayers offered, through Mary. Or if any farther specimen of the doctrine and spirit of the Catholic Church on this point be wanted, peruse,—oh, peruse, I pray you,—the little work entitled, "The Glories of Mary," written by St. Alphonsus Liguori, and translated into English by a Romish clergyman.

If this does not convince the most prejudiced, that I have "rather extenuated than set down aught in malice," they will be little remarkable for a spirit of candour. Of the outrages committed against the mediation of Christ in that book, I cannot give more convincing proof, than by telling you, that I have seen one or two more enlightened Roman Catholics

* Since this narrative was put to press, I have enquired for this work, and find it is out of print. I much regret this, for the sake of any who may feel curiosity on the subject.

significantly shake their heads, and, while evidently afraid of giving scandal by the admission, confess that they could not but take an exception to some things contained in it.

The medals may be purchased at any Roman Catholic bookseller's, or vender of crosses, images, beads, &c. To consecrate, however, and render them efficacious, the blessing of a priest is needful. The one given to me was duly sanctified, and accompanied also by a printed narrative of the miracle. With little remark I received it, for I felt unable to make any. The recital, however, was perused with avidity, but still no clue as to my feelings was obtained, excepting the somewhat suspicious one, my silence supplied. My friend, who was a firm believer in every thing connected with the Virgin's influence, or indeed in the marvellous in any shape, hardly liking this silence, followed up the attack by a detail of more prodigies, still harder of belief; as though by such an accumulated mass of miraculous evidence, she must take the citadel *per* force. But deep as was her listener's real veneration for Mother Church, and vigorously as she endeavoured to receive every thing offered to her credence, this was too much; and for a brief space I gave way in my own mind to unqualified disbelief, the uneasiness excited by which, was only modified at length by the remembrance, that the Church does not *compel* her children to receive any miracle as an article of *faith*; though so recommending them, when well attested, which this undeniably claimed to be. Still the stroke had been premature; the soil was not yet ready for such a growth. The

mind, despite itself, recoiled from such unaccustomed aliment; and an indefinable emotion of dread took possession of it, at the very thought of invoking Mary. So that for many weeks, no prayer, beyond what the public service required, or what was enjoined in the Confessional, was offered to her, and these at all times coldly and timorously. While in this state, a young lady, who had formerly attended the same church as myself, followed my example, and became a Catholic; and *after* consummating the act, said one day to me, when speaking of the difficulties upon this very point she had experienced ere effecting it, "I used sometimes to look at *you* and think I would give worlds to read your heart and see if you were fully satisfied. You are; are you not?" "Of course," said I, confusedly and evasively. If an arrow had pierced my bosom, I could not have suffered for the moment a keener pang. "Are not *you*?" "Yes, *now*, but it was a long struggle: your example did much." "I am glad it did," I replied, in a low and agitated voice, accompanied with a deep sigh. But the voice of conscience was more agitated still. I felt, for the first time, the dread influence of example; and while mine had led an immortal soul to embrace what her unbiassed conviction at first told her to be wrong, I myself, the author of the mischief, could not at that very moment, in *heart*, follow whither I had seemed to lead. Such reflections, however, were not permitted to intrude long; as temptations from the enemy of my peace, *perhaps* as an attempt to prevent me from obtaining a large treasure of heaven's gifts, they were repudiated; and henceforth my lips

were *constrained* to offer petitions to the throne of the "Queen of Heaven," and often also to resound her praises. Frequently came forth from a trembling heart such prayers as the following ; which, really, awful as it is in character, is a moderate specimen of the style of invocation in use. "We fly to thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God ; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but *deliver us from all dangers*, oh, ever-glorious and blessed Virgin." Then would follow a mental aspiration to the object of the prayer, that if I offered it not with all the necessary confidence, somewhat might be conceded to my education, and it might not work to my disadvantage in regard of receiving a reply.

On looking back at this page of my experience, how monstrous now appears the folly and impiety of which I was guilty. It seems an impossibility that such wild and egregious absurdities should have been enacted, or that the mind should have been brought down to a level so debased and infatuated. Eloquent testimony it is, to the depths to which the intellect will descend, when abandoned by the sole light appointed by heaven for its guidance. I feel as though I could not quit this part of my subject, without another word upon this fearful topic ; and yet what can I say new or fresh ? That the efficacy of Jesus' death and sufferings is dimmed, and rendered but of small effect, that his glorious prerogative of Mediatorship is wrested from Him, that his glory is given to another—a creature—and Himself insulted on his mediatorial throne, and this by millions daily and hourly, has been already implied, if not asserted ; and when

the thought comes home, that He has Himself declared, "He is a jealous God, and will *not* give his glory to another," the knowledge is sufficiently awful, even did it end here. But oh, Christians, Bible Christians of Britain, there is one if possible, more fearfully appalling still! It is to be feared,—yes, feared with sorrow scathing and heartfelt—that millions who insult their Saviour's mediation thus on earth, will never experience its saving efficacy, or see Him otherwise than as a Judge in heaven. It is to be feared that myriads of immortal spirits, who through life are clinging to a lie, will die with it in their mouths, and with it descend to eternity, there to regret through never-ending ages their pitiable folly and delusion. It is to be feared, that to this awful result, thousands are this day tending, and being *helped* to it with augmented speed, by the spurious toleration and supine indifference of their more highly-favoured and enlightened brethren around them. Oh ye—if any such scan these pages—remember it is one who has *felt* the direful working of the system, who now addresses you. It is one who bowed beneath it long, striving to *force* her spirit to its sway, and neither in haste or anger tore herself from its embrace. It is one who has *seen* God insulted, his dignity mocked, his mercy outraged, and his mediation made of none effect in the so-called *house of his friends*, Would that I could write with a pen of fire, or speak with a voice that *must* be heard, to advocate the cause of the Redeemer against enemies so Judas-like and treacherous. If God be God, serve Him: if Mary, lend your countenance to her worship.

CHAPTER VI.

For the strong spirit will at times awake,
Piercing the mists that wrap her clay abode ;
And, born of Thee, she may not always take
Earth's accents for the oracles of God ;
And even for this—O dust, whose mask is power !
Reed, thou would'st be a scourge thy little hour !

HEMANS.

A FEW words may now be devoted to my friends. Though deeply suffering during the foregoing events, yet, on finding their sorrow was unavailing to stay my progress, they wisely forebore to oppose farther than duty and affection seemed absolutely to demand. All that sound reason, wise argument, and real love could suggest, was still, as occasion served, called into requisition ; and no *opportunity* was permitted to escape, likely to prove of advantage towards reclaiming their misguided one. I keenly felt all the sadness of my position. The kindness of my friends was even more painful than their harshness had previously been. To a soul craving for sympathy, a heart possessing warm affections, and a mind full of an engrossing subject, alternately oppressed by doubt, and overflowing with enthusiasm ; my situation was ill-

suited, distressingly isolated :—not one underneath the same roof with whom to exchange an idea, or who felt the slightest interest in the subjects which alone interested me. On the contrary, gloom on the faces of all around, if not more marked demonstrations of dissatisfaction, whenever it was even remotely alluded to. Such a state of things was too painful to be borne, and after having endured until it seemed impossible to do so longer, I wrested from my parents a reluctant consent to quit home for a time, and mingle more freely amongst the friends and partizans of the creed of my adoption. Forth I went, for the first time for any serious space from the paternal roof, with a heart, which though owning many causes of sorrow, yet found some too of gratulation, in having for a while quitted an element so uncongenial. But this was wisely ordered, as later experience has amply proved, though its *immediate* consequences were not in the main beneficial. The working of the Roman Catholic Faith came here more fully under my observation, and many a bitter lesson had I to learn. The conformity, amongst the generality of Catholics living in the world, with its maxims and spirit, so that *it* and religion seemed as though they were destined to go hand in hand ; * the stress laid upon the *merit* of

* Here I may just notice the shock my feelings sustained almost immediately on my quitting home, by being introduced one Sabbath evening into a large circle of respectable, and—so-called—religious Catholics—that is, Catholics in the constant performance of the duties of their church, and frequenters of its sacraments—all busily employed in playing at cards. Accustomed as I had been from childhood to the strict observance of that sacred day, the impression of guilt and darkness produced was almost inexpressible, and for weeks I could not banish it.

works alone, to the exclusion or obscuring of saving faith, the utter want of *spirituality*, and seeming incapacity to understand what it meant, and their entire reliance on the efficacy of the sacraments at stated periods, struck me with a painful chill, and awakened many internal questions and comments. But anon I turned to their books of ascetical religion, to their lives of solitaires, saints, and martyrs, and here found amply sufficient scope for my fervour, had it been doubly as great as it was. The passion for deeds of self-sacrifice, and Christian heroism, was gratified even to satiety. The loftiest ambition of the most aspiring soul was here met and satisfied. It seemed like a peep into another world, after the influences at work around me. Contrast increased the charm, and from the midst of the cold and lax and indifferent world in which I lived, deep sighs were sent to the desert, and the cloister; and fervent supplications often offered, that the latter at least might hereafter be my lot. I frequently thought it a subject of regret, that with such a glowing and privileged belief, as my fanaticism led me to deem that of the Roman Catholics, there should be so much indifference manifested by the generality in the practice of it; and I turned to those who passed lives of seclusion and religious obligation, as the only classes who effectually carried out its precepts. This impression was much deepened by the influence of a circle into which I was just now introduced. Worldly-minded to an extreme degree, yet possessing a much larger amount of candour and information than usually belongs to those who have been born Roman Catholics, and willing, upon *theory*,

to discuss any debated point, it was precisely the kind of society most likely to be dangerous to me ; and its agency was not long in being painfully felt. Two individuals composing it soon formed a close intimacy with me, and discoursed with a freedom and plainness I had never encountered before. Possessing a keen sense of the ridiculous, and lively appreciation of the incongruous and inconsistent, they soon manifested their utter contempt for many minor details of Holy Church's doctrine and practice ; and unsparingly commented upon, and fearlessly scoffed at, much that was held up to the more fervent piety of her more docile or credulous children. Many things were told, and incidents related, of a character I could hardly believe, but which subsequent experience abundantly confirmed. Practices and follies they had been familiar with from childhood, but perfectly new to me, were spoken of as things of common occurrence, and even religious houses did not escape *scot-free*. The superstitions current within them, and the absurdities of familiar usage, were dwelt on, with a feeling appreciation of their puerile character ; and it soon became evident, that underneath the cloak of indifference which circumstances and position had induced, there ran a tide of stronger emotions and deeper earnestness, on the subjects they were discussing, than was intended to be apparent. A word reflecting on objects of so much veneration as monks and nuns, touched a sensitive chord in my mind ; and I often expressed surprise at what was said, now and then modestly venturing to dispute it, where I thought it harsh. My acquaintances, however, had been brought up in convents, and

gainsay their statements I could not. Expiation on the passive, or, as they express it, corpse-like obedience required of the *religieux* was a favourite topic, with one especially, who was the warmest-hearted; and the stern despotism which reduced them—at *first voluntary* sacrifices to a false principle—to the conditions of mere machines, while still full of life's passions and affections, was affectingly reprobated; while evident instances of crushed affections and desolate hearts were touchingly pourtrayed. I listened in sympathy and doubt, for though the heart can well estimate the value of such narratives *now*, they had not then the requisite power to deter their auditor from seeking at a later day, for their proof by experience. The other friend, with a more vivid estimation of the ridiculous, took most pleasure in incidents of that character. And amongst other things of a similar kind, when speaking of Convent Schools, she assured me, that it was a common practice, if the pupils lost any trifling article, either of amusement, work, or otherwise, to ask the Virgin or their patron saint to aid them to find it.

"Impossible! you are jesting," I replied.

"But indeed I am not. They do it, and believe they are heard too, I assure you."

The reliance placed upon the virtue of medals, crosses,* relics, &c, was unbounded, and hardly credi-

* Once about this time, while visiting a respectable and intelligent Catholic family—intelligent at least on *other* subjects—I was shown two *linen threads*, carefully preserved in a small glass case, which—with every appearance of firm faith on the part of the narrator—I was assured had belonged to a dress actually worn by the Blessed Virgin while on earth. Again, an *Ecce Homo*, said to be a veritable likeness of our Lord's face, is shewn; for

dible, and their efficacy and miraculous agency inculcated and proclaimed on every hand. But Christ was little spoken of, his merits little regarded, his love, nearness of access and readiness to help, little enforced, or known even, but as an abstract theory. The rosary, the litany of Loretto, and the saints, and other devotions of a similar character, stood first and foremost. All, all to some creature, to the obscuring of the Creator's highest and exclusive prerogative. Circumstances, too, of a doubtful character as regarded morality, in a certain quarter, were more than once hinted at, and the uses made in some instances of the Sacrament of Penance, vaguely alluded to. This, or at least much of it, at the time, I earnestly repudiated. I would not believe more than I had experienced. The proof however was destined to come in no dubious shape, at a later and not distant day. The things then whispered rather than boldly uttered, I regarded as a slander, and in some sort, reflection on the narrator. But a few short months revealed facts so undeniable and irrefragable, that the matter of these imputed *calumnies* was thrown quite into shadow by them. A dark page of experience was fast opening upon me, but so unaccustomed was the eye which scanned it, that I could not all at once believe in its truth.

the preservation of which we are indebted to the charity of a holy woman, called Veronica,—since sainted—who, as our Lord toiled up the steep path to Calvary, overcome with sweat and bathed in blood, wiped his Divine face with her handkerchief, upon which remained impressed for ever after in distinct characters, its adorable features. This is a trivial specimen of the materials with which the faith and veneration of the devout are nourished.

One or two occurrences of minor yet suspicious import, had already forced themselves upon my observation, when this burst forth beyond the power of contradiction. An instance it was of hypocrisy so hateful, of sacrilege so revolting, and abuse so gross of all things pure and holy, in the person of one bound by his vows, his position, and every law of his church, as well as God, to set a high example; that for a time my confidence was shaken in the very existence of sincerity and goodness. From a variety of quarters the muttered scandal reached me, and too soon I was destined to prove its truth. Sacraments deemed the most sacred were profaned, vows disregarded, the vaunted secrecy of the confessional *covertly* infringed, and its sanctity made a cloak to unhallowed purposes. So ran the account of evil, and a dire account it was. By it all serious thoughts of religion were well nigh scared away. The influence was fearful, the whirl of excitement supernatural, and it is to be feared the evil in some measure contagious. Human nature cannot long breathe an atmosphere of impurity, without being to a certain extent contaminated by it. The restraining grace of God preserved the souls exposed to it from finally falling, but the ordeal was an appalling and dangerous one. I cannot enter into minute particulars here. Every sense of feminine delicacy and womanly feeling, shrinks from such a task. But thus much I may say, that unable from the nature of the scandal to go to confession where I had been accustomed, I was obliged to make a journey at considerable expense and inconvenience in order to do

so elsewhere. Nor was I the only one so compelled. Common propriety however prevented me from mentioning more than was actually necessary to the confessor, and he seemed unable to give me any effectual advice in the matter. Meanwhile it grew worse, and the mischief more extended; until trembling for the result, I went to another priest, a friend of the transgressor, and at great sacrifice of personal feeling, told him as much of the affair as I deemed essential for his guidance, and entreated him for the sake of the probable scandal, to use his influence in getting his brother quietly removed without injuring him. Whether he did make any effort to do so, I never knew. If so, the effects were not visible. Things went on even worse than before, until at length a public exposure seemed inevitable. To prevent this, I, in conjunction with one or two others, took another journey to a confessor who was also an inmate of a religious house, thinking that *he* would, if only for the sake of edification, take some remedial measures, adequate to the urgency of the case. He heard our united statements, and expressed great indignation, and at once commanded us each to write and detail the circumstances of the case to the bishop of the district. This we did, but of course never heard the result. In a few weeks, however, the guilty individual was quietly removed, as though in the ordinary course of things, and so the scandal never transpired. The reminiscences of these dreary and wretched months seem now almost like some hideous dream. The mental excitement produced, and out-rage of feeling endured in the very act of confession

alone, so often repeated, and on such a subject, to say nothing of the dread and darkness which seemed completely to destroy every gleam of confidence and peace of conscience, forms no inconsiderable item in the sufferings of my life. It seemed like actual familiarization with unholy things, and I sometimes almost feared that it might become so.

The Romish religion teaches, that if you omit to name anything in confession, however repugnant or revolting to purity, which you even doubt may come under the category of mortal sins, your confession, or confessions, however so many, which have been made subsequently to such omissions, are nothing worth, in fact sacrilegious ; and all require to be made over again before the absolution can avail ; while it also inculcates that sins of *thought* should be confessed, in order that the confessor may judge of their mortal or venial character.* What sort of a spiritual chain this links around the strictly conscientious, I would attempt to pourtray if I *could* ; but it must have been *worn* to understand its torturing character. Suffice it to say, however, that I had been for some months in the habit of confessing to this bad priest himself, ere I became aware of his real character—and though I had certainly sometimes suspected him, yet being from circumstances compelled to make use of his ministry, I had never of course named my injurious suspicions to him : and I further candidly

* Of course I judge my readers to be aware of the difference made by Catholics, between mortal and venial sins. In brief, however, mortal sin deserves *hell*, while venial may be atoned for in purgatory.

acknowledge, that from utter incapacity to allude to such subjects, and dreading their baneful effects on my own mind, I had on several previous occasions passed by thoughts and circumstances which I had *doubted* my confessors would call sin, so that now I was involved in a labyrinth of perplexity and disquiet from which I saw no escape, but through the medium of a general confession, dating from the first time I could recal such omission. To this I made up my mind. But this confessor's scrupulosity exceeded everything I had ever encountered hitherto. He told me many things were mortal sins, that I had hardly deemed sin at all before; and thus a host of anxieties for my *first* general confession was awakened within me. I had no resource, therefore, but to remake *that*, and thus I afresh entered on the bitter path I had deemed I should never have occasion to tread again. But if that first confession had lacerated my feelings, what, *what* was it, to *this* one? Words have no power, language has no expression, for the emotions which characterized the task from the commencement of it to the close. Had I been really less sincere, and remorseful for what I deemed my faults than I was, it *must* have awakened me, deeply sunk in darkness as I had become. The difficulty I felt in entering on the subjects I was compelled to do, and the distress I manifested,—which I suppose is natural to my sex, though I *have* met with some among them strangely familiar with such topics,—furnished my confessor, of course, with a plea for his assistance in the questioning department; and some of the images supplied, and feelings elicited, I

would fain cancel as foul blots in memory. I soon found that he made mortal sins of what my *first* confessor had thought but lightly of, or professed to do so, and he did not scruple to pronounce that I had never *yet* made a good confession at all. My ideas therefore became more complicated and confused as I proceeded, until at length I began to feel literally hopeless of ever accomplishing my task in any degree satisfactorily ; and my mind and memory were positively racked to recal every iota of every kind, real or imaginary, that may hereafter be occasion of uneasiness should it be omitted. The most simple childish follies were recounted, and magnified into mortal sin ; and as day after day I knelt, sometimes for hours at the feet of that man, answering queries, and listening to reproofs, calculated to bow my very soul in the dust, I felt as though I should never raise my head again. The confession lasted at intervals over the space of a fortnight, that is, I went perhaps to him thrice in the week, for that time, and to chronicle a small part of what passed there would sully the paper. O how can the judgment ever be so perverted as to call such pollution purity ;—how can the mind ever be so darkened as to believe that such an awful parody upon the divine prerogative of the Immaculate and spotless Lamb of God, can be aught but the most fearful mockery ? Even I, benighted as I was, sometimes trembled, I knew not why. Never shall I forget my sensations on two or three occasions at that time. Once, my confessor having been unexpectedly called away, I went to the Church-porch for air, while awaiting his return. How I gasped for some relief

to my overwrought mind ! the memory even now oppresses me. But that was soon superseded by feelings more insupportable still ; as he came with his unchanged smile and broad gaze to summon me back to my terrible task. Even this however sank into insignificance a day-or-two afterwards, when I went to proceed with my confession. I was desired to *repeat* what had most harrowed my feelings over again. I replied, I had confessed it once already, and ventured some demur ; when I was told in the most merciless manner, that *if I had*, he had forgotten it, and the command enforced, with the consolatory assurance, that the repetition would *only serve to humble me.** A feeling almost akin to suffocation for the moment overwhelmed me, and I felt as if the words would

* This style of reasoning was once more resorted to by the same individual. Some time after, when far removed from him by distance, my poor bewildered conscience again became uneasy, at some fancied omitted details in even this confession : so unsatisfactory and tormenting is the character of the exaction ; and I had no resource but to write to him, (for I could not go to another Priest) and express my fears ; stating at the same time that the nature of the suspected omissions were but incidental, in short, a want of explicitness in trifling details arising from my embarrassment, and requesting to know what I was to do, or whether they were of consequence ? He replied, desiring me to put down *in writing* exactly what disturbed me, and send it to him, telling me that at least it *would humble me*. This, at much cost to myself I did. What think you was the result ? The *thing* that pained me most of all in a delicate point of view, I was desired to carry to confession to *another* Priest, and he had actually defiled the paper by putting down in black and white, the exact form of words I was to employ in stating the case. I blushed, as in the solitude of my chamber I read it, and trembled from agitation and excitement. How much more in the realization, let imagination tell.

choke me. I leaned against the confessional for support, but with promptings and suggestions he at length gained his point. On rising from my knees I was unable to stand, for the time ; a kind of *fallen* and *crushed* feeling seemed to paralyze me, both physically and mentally. He smilingly attributed it to the length of time I had been kneeling, and commenced talking on the most indifferent subjects, with as great freedom and coolness as though I had no cause for one unpleasant thought ; and talked on thus for an hour. At the end of that time a lady of my acquaintance called upon him, and after another half-hour thus consumed, we left together. She was the mother of a family, and a devoted Catholic, as pure I believed in heart as life ; and as I walked home by her side, I looked at her in wonder. I could not smother the questions which *would* arise within me, as to the purity of the duty I had just been performing. What would I have given to have thrown myself on her maternal bosom, and have asked, *Do you, can you* know of these things ? and if so, will you bring your children up exposed to such horrors ? What would I have given for even *one* friend to whom I could fully have opened my mind, capable of understanding and advising me. But the fetters were on me, and I soon awoke as from a sinful dream, to torment myself with the enquiry, whether *such reflections* were not *wrong* ? while conscience, or the fiend—whispered they ought to be *confessed*. From this dilemma indeed, I only at length escaped by the conviction that they were involuntary, and absolutely unavoidable.

I merely name this to shew the galling nature of my chains, and my case is not solitary. By scruples and doubts of as ridiculous, and even a more puerile character, I have seen one or two most sincere Catholics driven to the very verge of distraction : I have known them go to confessor after confessor, and wander hither and thither, at great loss of time and money, to get relief to their minds, without being a whit nearer the goal they aimed at. Every *thought* on which rests a *doubt*, should be confessed, they are told, and the scrupulous *see* this doubt in the thoughts of each day and hour. Hence there is no end to their misery if they once become severely exact. God's love and the Saviour's mercy, are all made subservient to the dictum of a priest, if not entirely lost sight of, by the poor dupes of their fanaticism. What a terrible idea, that instead of the simple faith which justifies, such a figment as the merit of his own performances, should be held out as the only means of man's salvation, still farther to distress the mind of the already distressed sinner. How entirely justification is made to *depend* on *this merit*, and also how completely the really sincere are priest-led, I would just give this exemplification. One of the ladies slightly involved in the affair with the bad priest already alluded to, on becoming aware how widely the scandal had extended, went to the *religieux* to whom I have adverted, who had received several confessions on the subject, in order to add her testimony to the general mass of evidence. She was an innocent-minded, and I believe most guileless girl, and sincerely anxious to save her soul, which she believed

was to be accomplished by obedience to the commands of her church. Not more than four months before, or five at farthest, she had, after a great deal of anxiety on the subject, made a general confession of the sins of her whole life.

It was only the *last* of several; but as she had been most painfully particular, and had sought out a confessor famed for his guidance of souls, she hoped it was the *best*, indeed the *final one*; for I have myself heard her say, that if she knew she was going to die, she should not wish to make another after this. The knowledge she had possessed of the irregularities of this immoral priest, however, from a charitable wish to screen him, and also because she really doubted whether she ought to speak ill of him, she had not alluded to in this confession, and for this reason—founded in charity as well as respect for his office—the arbitrary *religieux* told her, that her long and difficult confession was invalid, and good for nothing; and commanded her to *repeat* it to him. Deep as was her reverence for the ministers of the church, she would not for a time believe him, and refused to comply with his demand. He remonstrated, persuaded, and resorted to all the authority of which he was master,—still in vain. She lowered her position so far as to admit, however, that what he said *might* be true; but if so, she would not make her general confession *to him*. He then spoke of her self-will, and endeavoured to make her sense of pious submission to the church, the means to extort compliance. Ashamed at this, she pleaded her state of health—which was then so precarious, that he him-

self had predicted in six months she would be in her grave—and the mental anxiety it would occasion; also how likely this would be to retard her recovery, and asked at least for a little respite, until she could gather more strength, when she promised to make it without loss of time. But all was fruitless. Her very argument became his stronghold. What if she should become worse instead of better, and so, more unfit for such a task, and then die without absolution? In short, he shook the rod of spiritual terrors so effectually over the debilitated, and really sincere-minded victim, that she had no alternative, and was compelled to obey him; which she actually did, without any other reason than his despotic and sovereign *will*. But did her perplexity end here? Oh! no! believe it not. She was subsequently reduced to the verge of the grave, from the same complaint under which she was at that time suffering, and lay for many weeks as on the borders of eternity. In that state I saw her repeatedly, and was witness to her agitation and distress of mind. Constrained against her conscientious sense of right, to perform a duty hastily, which *her* scrupulosity required a long time and much thought to perform at all, she was filled with doubts and fears of the most harassing character; and instead of being supported by the Christian's *certain* hope in a season of such extremity, upon her sick bed she was wasting the little strength she could summon, in writing painful letters to this harsh arbiter of her spiritual fate,* to express her

* It should be stated she was then at a great distance from him.

difficulties, confess her supposed derelictions, and obtain her passport to heaven.

Of the *comfort* he afforded her, I *could* speak, but it is useless. Suffice it to say, her weary soul was *not* pointed to the pitiful Saviour, for free and unmerited forgiveness and peace, but after keen and protracted anxiety, and much mental conflict, she was at length permitted to calm herself as well as she could, by the assurance, that now she had at length done her best, she might at least hope for heaven. Thus were the means taken to prevent the commission of priestly crime, converted into a source of pain and annoyance on every hand; which was well nigh enough to make one question, whether the remedy was not almost as bad as the disease. In its effects upon many minds, I believe it may have proved so. I speak advisedly. The one was infamy, whose very bold unblushing front appalled, and placed you in some measure on your guard; the other was an insidious shape of abomination, screened by a holy name. It was, forsooth, the *sacrament* of penance. But here I may be reminded by the advocates of the dogma, that whatever had to be endured, arose out of the *nature* of the confession to be made. Willingly I grant the plea. I do not unqualifiedly blame the confessor. But the *fact* is worth a thousand arguments upon the subject, and speaks more than all the homilies ever written, for the direful character of the institution. For if such suffering and annoyance had to be borne at the hands of one who professed to regard his fellow-minister's crime with abhorrence, in the very *confession* of that crime; if such consequences

resulted only in the *legitimate* use of a sacred thing, what must be its awful effects, where the priest himself is faulty? and what must be the fearful amount of contamination, when it is converted into an instrument of abuse? Oh the frightful influence of guilt in an individual placed in a position of such tremendous trust and responsibility. No more dangerous or subtle snare, for those beneath his control, could be devised by the combined malice of the powers of darkness. The most virtuous may not say they are proof against it. The sternest in their strength of purpose, cannot assure themselves, "so far will we go, but no further." Those who have hitherto fled each thought of impurity as defilement, here *know not its guise*. The very principles seem in danger of becoming perverted, one's ideas of right and wrong confounded; the judgment to be hoodwinked, and utterly bewildered; while evil wears a mask so treacherous that the victim to its influence is led on blindfold. The very confession of guilt to an individual, who seems bound by his character and office to detest and reprehend it, instinctively precludes the idea of the possibility of it, in connection with *himself*. The very humiliation of supplicating for pardon at his hands, seems to place him so far above the petitioner, that the *thought* of suspecting *him* becomes a crime; while the familiarity with such subjects between him and his penitent thus induced, intuitively lessens by degrees the horror on both sides. Thus the mind may be debased to an extent fearful to contemplate, before the sufferer is aware of the danger surrounding her. *Then* if temptation comes—to God's pre-

venting grace alone is it to be attributed, if she is proof against it. I have known an individual, who in the confessional, has been severely rebuked for the bare *permission* of a fault in connection with *another*, the very next week exposed to a worse, from the confessor himself; and on some kind of remonstrance being attempted, she has been told that to *him* it was no sin, because *he meant* none. And even worse instances than this have come under my observation. Here, however, justice compels me to say, that I have met with noble exceptions, instances of pure and exalted virtue, where such abomination would be abhorred, and the slightest approach to it shunned as a pestilence. But of the too common effect of the confessional, after extended experience, I can have *no doubt*; and my impression may be stated in few words. That while to pure and heaven-guarded souls it *may* be pure, to those of an opposite character it is a source of terrible temptation, the baneful results of which eternity perhaps only will reveal. But though I dismiss it thus now, the circumstances I have briefly related in connection with it, were not so dismissed from my mind. The malignant influence was at work many a day and many a night too, until an accumulated mass of anxiety and wretchedness seemed sometimes almost weighing me to the earth.*

* Oh that this, my bitter experience, may warn some, and fain would I pray, appeal to some Catholics also; but I fear *this* is a hopeless wish. Excepting those who have similarly suffered, none would believe me; and even they, who in their *hearts know* that I am speaking truth, are so deeply infatuated, that they regard such instances of turpitude as that I have narrated, but as abuses; never for an instant looking *from them* to the *originating*

Yet strange to say, so infatuated was I by the claims of my infallible church, that I dared not name the occurrence to one soul hostile to those claims, and treasured the secret as though my life depended on its preservation ; never for an instant admitting a thought more injurious to the faith or morality of the Church, than that it was an untoward abuse of both.

And here I may remark, that it is neither my intention, nor is it in accordance with the spirit in which I write, to take up uncharitably the instances of abuse I have met with, and reproachfully animadvert upon them. But the inference to be drawn from them is so legitimate, indeed inevitable, that a word cannot be forbore thereupon. Human nature is the same in every age and clime, alike depraved and unworthy of trust, still more of unlimited sway. If therefore such a specimen of flagrant dereliction as that I have given, occurred in Protestant England in the nineteenth century, in the very face of a convert from Protestantism, how rife must such have been in ages when the Church was in her full power, with no

cause. In proof of this, when I was really burdened in mind almost beyond endurance from the painful knowledge I possessed, I sought, after much reflection, the counsel of a really pious and sincere young Catholic lady, laying before her, even with tears, a small part of what so distressed me. What was her conduct ? She doubted my statements, and though I gave her proof *unequivocal*, to a mind not in the most extreme degree prejudiced, she disbelieved me ; even carrying the fact of her having listened to me, to confession, as a sin on her own part against charity and the reverence due to the character of her spiritual guides. Nay, I had some reason afterwards to believe, from indirect information I received, that she had taken it to the very Priest himself whom I had implicated.

gospel-truth to hold the torch of light upon its deeds, and no strong hand to restrain them. How frequent, it is to be feared, must they be now, in countries where darkness still sits upon the face of the people ; and how awfully demoralizing, and productive of incalculable mischief. To the truth of this inference, history supplies pretty ample testimony. Yet abundant as this is, it is still to be apprehended, that many of the crimes thus committed, and, in the annals of *time* traced in water, are, in the roll of *eternity*, stamped in indelible characters by the hand of the recording angel, at the dread day of judgment alone to meet their fearful sentence.

And to refute the idea which some may be disposed to insinuate, that I am propagating a covert calumny under a safe disguise, I fearlessly assert, that every iota of what I have now barely hinted, rather than depicted, can be substantiated by an indisputable reference to *names*, *dates*, and *places*. And though but one individual knows every particular of the history, and he in virtue of his office is bound by every law to secrecy ; yet *enough* is known to others, and some who were personally concerned, to enable me to defy a refutation, even had I, instead of taking the more lenient course I have, laid it in its worst features open to the world. This however I could not do. Regard for the feelings of those implicated in it, has withheld me from giving any clue distinct enough to lead to the most remote exposure ; and I will now resume the thread of my narrative by stating that after my general confession to the last individual named, and the consequent letter to the Bishop, I

struggled hard to rest more satisfied ; and with a heart more fervent, and a mind more subdued, endeavoured to banish the injurious impression by increased sincerity and devotedness. The passion for conventual life returned with all its force, and an ideal rather than the actual world, was again inhabited by me, as I turned to its fancied holy seclusion, as to a place of refuge and safety.

I returned home to witness after some time the sickness and death of my mother. And this, as has been depicted in the former narrative referred to, powerfully tended to deepen the serious impressions already firmly implanted in my mind. The struggle consequent on these, and the step to which they ultimately led, have been also imperfectly there delineated. But much remains to be added, of an incidental character, which worked to the *final* result therein pourtrayed ; and that it did not do so earlier, speaks more powerfully than any other evidence could, as to the blinding as well as enslaving nature of the superstition, which had taken such fast hold of my mind. Oh ! in the first stages of the inquiry, how would my intellect have spurned the puerile and weak fables I was now constrained to listen to and receive. But there is no pause to the march of superstition, when once it subjugates and works through the engine of *fear*. Fastings, and bodily austerities too, are powerful auxiliaries to reduce the mental faculties to the required ebb of torpor and subserviency, while priestly influence puts the finishing stroke to the work. These means had been all vigorously plied with too much sincerity on the part of the

votaress, and a skilful hand behind the scenes. The purpose was accomplished—the victory seemingly won.

Pause. There is One who sitteth above the thunder-clouds, and marks the dwellers upon earth, taking account of all their plans and doings. And oh ! how often in his dealings with his creatures, are his fearful words verified.—“ The Holy One shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision.”

CHAPTER VII.

Yes, sign away your birthright, vilely sell
God's noblest gift, the heritage of Heav'n :
List, list, and crouch while mocking tyrants tell,
The high reward to willing slavery giv'n.
Bend lowly, lowlier still, even in the dust,
Fall down and worship !—who ?—the Priest, not God,
He holds the keys of Heav'n, in him put trust,
Who shuts and opens, with his awful nod.

MS.

To record my mental sufferings at this time, or the struggles between, what seemed to me a sacrifice demanded by God, and my natural affections, would be a task quite beyond my power ; none but those who have been similarly tried could understand them. Suffice it to say, that after many prayers and tears—strangely deluded as I was, I quitted my friends and home, as I believed for ever. One thought alone sustained me in the cruel ordeal, that of escaping the dangers of the world, and *assuring* my eternal salvation. The example of the Catholic saints of old, and the blessedness of entire consecration to the service of God, came in still farther to animate my fervour, in undertaking so self-denying a vocation. Struggling hitherto, by my own unaided efforts, and natural

strength, to overcome temptation, and eschew evil ; and knowing not how by simple faith to lay hold of the Christian's hidden strength, the world had always seemed a place too full of snares and pitfalls, to walk through with more than a bare chance of safety. I had yet to learn, that though " the world has dangers, solitude has snares."

I had no portion, for my father would not for such a purpose advance even a trifling sum ; so, instead of seeking admission into a convent in England, it was proposed to me to go abroad to make my noviciate ; where my knowledge of English, and other qualifications for teaching, would go far towards supplying the important deficiency. The order into which I was offered admission, is one but little known in England ; a solitary branch or two having been sent over from the Continent, under the superintendence of the children of Alphonsus Liguori, or the Redemptorists, as they are generally called. With these Monks they work, and are themselves styled of " the third order of St. Francis." I was acquainted with a monastery and convent of both denominations, acting in concert with each other, and into the latter it was agreed that I should enter, for a preparation of a few weeks, previous to embarking for my foreign destination. The *Religieux* to whom I had applied, in the case of the scandal referred to in the last chapter, was one of these monks. To him I had committed the direction of my conscience since the affair, and by his advice I now acted. Anticipating much opposition from my friends at the thought of my going abroad, and thinking by thus gaining time to weaken the force of

separation, I was too glad to catch at any chance of breaking the matter more gently to them. My *director* indeed advised me to keep them in ignorance altogether of my determination to leave England, until it was either beyond recal, or a few hours alone must intervene before its execution; so that there might be as little time as possible for reproaches or remonstrances, that might endanger or weaken my resolution. I will not comment on the uprightness of principle, and regard to truth, manifested by my infallible guide in counselling me to such a course of conduct; or yet upon the ruthless policy which could seek to sever a child from an only surviving parent, for an indefinite period, perhaps for ever, without the consolation of a last adieu;—for the act is its own best comment.* But driven almost to desperation by my conflicts of mind, and anxious at any hazard to save myself the agony of separation, with all its reproach and remorse, as well as a demand upon my fortitude and resolution, I almost trembled to subject myself to; as also, because I cherished the hope held out to me of returning to England, my novitiate expired, I consented to this concealment. It was

* As a specimen of the *consideration* I had to expect from this source, I will just give the following true incident. While in private conversation one day with this director, I was dwelling on my mother's loss, and the double weight with which the stroke of my own departure was likely to fall upon my bereaved father in consequence, and with moistened eyes expressed my fears that I might never see him again. With a bitter smile my auditor replied, instead of attempting to console me, "Not only in this world I fear you will be separated, but in the *next also*." "Hush, hush!" I murmured in a low tone, "You *must* not say that." He however was cold-hearted enough to confirm his words.

however never acted upon. When I arrived at the convent, I was placed under the direction for the time, of an older *religieux*, the superior of his house : and his sagacity, or as I would fain hope, better feelings, at once pointed out that it would neither be consistent with sound policy, or in accordance with straightforwardness and truth. This was however not decided until I had already suffered all I could suffer on the point ; and until almost bowed beneath a burden of self-reproach and disingenuousness, I had bid adieu, as I thought, for ever—to every tie of kindred and affection ; while the very kindness which I had experienced in parting, arising from the entire ignorance of my friends concerning my design, had augmented my remorse in a ten-fold degree.

A retreat of a few days, in the adjacent convent, was all for which I had asked their consent. Under a pressure of contradictory and painful feelings which only the Reader of hearts could know, I entered upon the duties of my new existence ; for amidst all my more enthusiastic and excited feelings, the cruel deception I had practised was ever predominant. The doctrine was as yet new to me, that *the end sanctifies the means*. Throwing myself however back upon the advice of my director, when such feelings appeared in danger of becoming victorious, I endeavoured as well as I could, to maintain composure, and by the stern fulfilment of the claims of my vocation, to banish reflection if possible ; and as this advice had been so emphatically given as to remove all responsibility from my *conscience* in the matter, I in part at length sometimes succeeded. The need however did

not last long. For about a week previous to the time fixed for my departure, the more experienced monk to whom I have alluded, quite unexpectedly desired me to send a letter home to my friends, informing them in full of my design; and endeavouring by every argument of which I was mistress, to reconcile them to it. I obeyed. But scarcely was the letter dispatched, when the same evening he arrived at the convent, and summoning me from the chapel where I was engaged, intimated his wish that I should myself follow it, early on the following morning; see my friends and endeavour to win their consent, personally; of course, however, with the understanding, that should I fail in doing this, I must return without it. This was tantamount to a command, and I had no resource but to obey. Could I have regarded this proceeding as entirely disinterested on the part of my adviser, I should perhaps in some sort, have suffered less keenly than I did. But meaner motives of a pecuniary character, which I was aware mingled with it, made it inexpressibly painful on every hand. I had indeed, as I then suspected and soon fully proved, been most insincerely and dishonourably treated by the man who had *at first* been the cause of my entering the convent. The particulars of the affair are however so insignificant and paltry to give here, though I may just remark, that by promises concerning my expenses to the continent, which he knew at the time he could not perform, he had deceived and misled me; indeed, I may say, *beguiled* me, into consenting to go abroad. For, assuredly, had I known at first, what I soon learnt later, I should never, *could*

never, have given such a consent. In addition therefore to all my other sources of grief, in facing my friends under such circumstances, I was charged with a commission, to endeavour to wring from my outraged father, a sum sufficient to cover the expenses of my journey, &c ; though, when seeking to persuade me to take the journey, the defrayal of them all had been eagerly volunteered ; and with the perfect understanding, and positive agreement that it should be so, I had yielded my consent, and rested satisfied until now. Surprised and uneasy as I felt at the occurrence, I endeavoured to make no other reflection upon it, than that it was another cross permitted by God, as a test of my vocation. And from a motive of blind, passive, almost stupid submission, I obeyed the mandate of the superior, and went home at seven the following morning. To say that I hardly knew *how*, or *why*, is only speaking literally. I dared not think, reason, or question. I could only mutely appeal to heaven for strength. Every sensitive feeling of my nature was lacerated to torture. Soon however a dulness, akin to stupor, took possession of me, a kind of insensibility, which blunted for a time the edge of my susceptibility, and a vague clinging to some power supernatural.—I persuaded myself it was God—seemed to sustain me. The crushing influence of a long life of despotic subjection, could hardly have done more towards consummating the purpose of my superiors. It needed no farther test. The mastery was accomplished already ; and henceforth, until God worked my deliverance, all minor trials were minor ones indeed.

On looking back to this period, the amount of infatuation to which I had arrived, seems almost incomprehensible. As the shadows and gloom of night fade away before the beams of the sun, almost making the reality of the previous dense darkness seem impossible, were it not an indisputable fact: so in the bright light of unadulterated truth, appears the heathenish blindness, and mental hallucination to which I was given up, a thing to wonder at, and almost doubt. Thoroughly imbued with the idea that the entire conquest of the *will* was the height of perfection, and to own no law of existence but the pleasure of superiors, was to perform *God's* law most absolutely, inasmuch as they stood in his place: no effort or self-sacrifice, either mental or bodily, at whatever cost of pain or suffering, that behoved to accomplish this, was too great. Life itself would not have stood, *did not* stand, in the balance. The spirit of that despotism teaches, that the more abjectly you crawl upon the earth, and the more servilely become the puppet of even the lowest and meanest agency appointed to rule over you, the more elevated the height of holiness, and perfect the *spiritual* freedom, to which you attain. And this spirit had taken such firm possession of my mind, that had my superiors trampled me under their feet while prostrate before them, I should have received such marks of their love for my soul with resignation, if not gratitude. Such a statement may excite the smile of those who have had no opportunity of experiencing how the influences to which I had been long subject, *work*,—or how subtilely the system

pervades, controls, and subjugates every thought and feeling, twining itself around the very inmost folds of the inmost heart and nature. It has stratagems for every emergency, engines for every work, weapons for every warfare, seed that will fructify and flourish on every soil. And oh with the sincere and earnest about their salvation, how strangely and cruelly successful it becomes. What will not man *do* to gain the favor of God, when once convinced of its necessity? What will he not undertake to ensure his salvation, when awakened to its vast importance? Will not the martyr perish at the stake? and poor, weak frail humanity dare pangs unutterable? Will not the very heathen in his blindness court and embrace torments as appalling as protracted? and the weakest nature submit to sufferings and privations, which can only end with life? Has not the idea been prevalent in all ages, and almost every clime, amongst the great mass of mankind, that sufferings are among the chief means to propitiate Deity? And under this conviction, what has not been accomplished? It is an error congenial to the *pride* of human nature, which cannot stoop to confess its impotence. To be entirely helpless, hopelessly lost, irremediably undone; to be just nothing but sin, and misery; to see this, *feel it*, and yet be able to *do nothing*; to *suffer nothing* towards accomplishing our redemption, that without the merits of another can have the slightest worth or efficacy, is too humiliating for a depraved nature readily to yield assent to.

But to come acknowledging all this, and cast the soul thus, at the feet of the Saviour, absolutely de-

pendent on His free and unmerited grace and mercy, with sincerity of heart and purpose, is what the proud sinner must be utterly driven to before he will submit. The testimony of every past age, all experience abundantly proves this. Hence the self-seeking, the hard penances, the voluntary privations, and almost incredible sufferings, which Christians and Heathens have alike practised. Hence the attempt to merit heaven by prayers multiplied without end, by pilgrimages, by votive offerings, by numberless intercessors other than Christ has appointed, and even in the next world by purgatorial fires, with all the other "refuges of lies" to which fallen nature has clung. There is sadness in the thought that a way so easy, so simple, so perfect and sublime as the way of faith in a Redeemer, should by the pride, the demon-like pride of man's heart be so perverted, and its blessings shorn of their effect. But so it is; and when once the infatuation seizes the mind, that by *works* we are saved, and that mind is sincere and fervent in its desire for salvation, then there is no limit to its fanaticism, or to its extremes of presumption in its efforts to accomplish so arduous a task. This was my present state of conviction; and my earnestness and zeal set no limits to my endeavours. Hence the strange facility with which I fell in with all I saw, and all that was demanded of me. Some of the practices at the convent, though matters of surprize at first, were soon even cause of congratulation, because their tendency was a humiliating one.

Such were kissing the ground, kneeling with the clasped hands raised as in supplication, every time

permission was asked to go anywhere, or do anything. Again, kneeling to ask for a penance if the slightest accident occurred; and many other trifles of a similar character. The journey home performed, the worst test was accomplished, and nothing hereafter had much power to move me painfully. Lost to every tie on earth, and every interest likewise, I henceforth sought to die to every feeling of a human character; and aught that helped to this consummation, was hailed and performed with eagerness. When I reflected on that day of misery, I *felt* the worst was passed, I knew I *could* not suffer more; and deemed every lighter trial, even as child's play, after this most heavy one. Zealously guarded too, at every avenue by the ogre confession, no thought alien to my vocation could have been harboured, even had it intruded; and kept up to the requisite strain of fervor and excitement, and *down* to the necessary level of humility and subjection, by works on Hell, the Value of the Soul, and obligations of Religious Life; there was no danger for the present of my resolution flagging. The exalted standard set up for my imitation on the latter point, was one grand means of gaining the desired end. It made me feel how futile was every attempt to gain the lofty height before me, and viewing myself in the comparison as a very pigmy, my humiliation was as complete as my ardor was increased. The sole course of my reading, the whole burden of every homily, lecture, and instruction was self-mortification and passive obedience. To recal *all* I read or heard upon these engrossing topics, would be to recal more folly and absurdity than it

would be well for the mind to retain. But if the reader desires a specimen of the former style, I advise him to purchase "The Nun Sanctified, by St. Alphonsus Liguori." This will be a more eloquent comment on my assertions, than any recitals of mine can be, however accurately given. In it he will see the mind brought down to the lowest depths of humiliation and contrition for sin : then the tortured soul, instead of being led to Christ for healing, tormented still farther by lectures on penance, and austerity, before which the flesh shrinks appalled ;—the obedience and renunciation of religious life, set forth in even its most puerile details, and the whole, here and there, interspersed with anecdotes of the most ridiculous and childish character, according to the subject they are intended to enforce or apply. The whole aim of the rulers of the Roman Catholic Church is to work through fear ; to subjugate the human mind by the invincible weapons of spiritual terrors. They well know their ground, and how infallible *it* is at least, if *they* are not. The man who mocks at human power, will tremble before this. The mightiest mind *has* bowed, and will still bow before it ; and the most potent of earth's lords and governors have crouched down like cravens in abject submission. What wonder then if woman's weaker heart and lowlier intellect is schooled by such means to the pliancy required. But though a taste of the kind of food supplied to the mind in the reading department, is as I have intimated, at the command of every one in the book quoted, not so that *orally* supplied. And if the reader will pardon the digression, I will indulge him with a

specimen or two, taken without premeditation, from many others. Discussing the virtue of obedience, on a certain occasion, with a holy Father, or rather listening to a lecture from him upon the interesting subject, my ears were regaled with the following.

“A monk, who shall be nameless, though his name was given, was so celebrated for his absence of any *will* at all, that it became a problem, whether any test, however ingenious, could discover traces of one. After some rumination on the subject by one of his superiors, the brilliant idea was elicited, of applying the ordeal of fire. Accordingly next time the large bread oven of the monastery was heated for baking purposes, the poor *will-lacking* wight was commanded forthwith to insert his person therein, in order to see whether the prospect of being baked to gratify his superior’s caprice, could bring to light evidences of the missing commodity. What think you reader? Did it do so? No such thing: without a moment’s thought of consequences, without even an instant’s hesitation, in he plunged. And the result! Oh! it was astonishing indeed. Like Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, when cast into the fire, a miracle was wrought in his favour; and in reward of his obedience, he came out without a hair of his head being scathed.”

This is a specimen of the style-marvellous; the next is of a different class, it illustrates the *means* employed of an *active* character to crush and efface even the last trace of man’s glorious birthright. This on another occasion, when encouraging me to brave the trials of the Noviciate, was detailed for my ex-

ample by the same individual who had told me the first. It is as follows ; and professed to be a *personal* reminiscence. " While in the Noviciate he committed some fault against discipline,—its exact character it is useless to detail here,—but it was trifling. The Novices having assembled in the place where it was usual to make public confession of their peccadilloes of that nature, out came that of my hero ; though not without some trepidation, and a little necessary and seemingly kind encouragement from the Novice-Master. No sooner however was the crime fairly confessed, then up rose the Novice Master in great apparent wrath, and pointing to a huge heap of stones in a part of the grounds adjacent, commanded him to go and pile up those stones to as great a height as possible, until leave was given him to desist. The victim obeyed, and obeyed hour after hour, until the seasons of devotion, recreation, and refectio had all alike passed. And when at length worn out with fatigue, and exhausted for want of food, he lay down by the side of the pyramid he had reared, unable to touch another stone, his stern tyrant completed his arbitrary penance by sending him to his dormitory still fasting." Sad as this may appear, it was given to me as true, and both it and the former incident can be substantiated by name and place. Is it any wonder that the spirit should be utterly crushed, any matter of astonishment that the power of even mental volition should be well nigh extinguished ? Yet this man seemed to exult in the firmness of the Superior, as having gained a great and decisive victory ! Fit tools for such work !

CHAPTER VIII.

Fresh shadows gather round me, dark and dread.
 'Tis vain ! No human effort can constrain belief ;
Oh would that I were with the peaceful dead,
 Freed from the crushing weight of doubt, and grief.
Guide me, O Father ! help me, God of Heav'n !
 Teach me, O Jesus ! sweet Redeemer, save !
If, if I err, I sue to be forgiven,
 Can I do more than thus *Thy* mercy crave.

MS.

PREVIOUS to my departure for the Continent, after my return from my farewell visit home, I had yet another deep trial to undergo. My sister would not let me thus leave, without a last effort to save me from the abyss into which I was about to plunge myself ; and full of her kindly purpose came to see me at the convent. Instigated by the tenderest feelings, she again endeavoured, by every appeal to my reason, duty, and affection, to overcome my resolution, and induce me to return home. Thus the conflict I had thought at an end had to be anew encountered ; and feeling so overcome as to be but little able to remonstrate, my chief reply was silence and tears. The trust in God, however, that I felt and expressed, that if it was not His will, the step would be overruled

and prevented, somewhat consoled her ; for she knew it could not be so strong, without much fervent prayer had been offered on the subject. Though failing in her intention therefore, she parted with a mind somewhat relieved, and many a promise, that if I should hereafter regret, or be in difficulty, she would be the first to aid, and, if possible, emancipate me. On leaving, I, by permission, accompanied her a little distance on her way ; and into those few last fleeting moments were crowded more than years of inexpressible emotion. How futile are words often to portray the workings of the heart ; how inadequate at all times of deep and solemn feeling ! They are powerless now ; and the only idea they can convey, is, that all life's past sensations of love and grief, pain and sorrow, the parting from home excepted, grew faint and weak before the strangely and agonizingly blended feelings of that hour. There are martyrdoms of heart more torturing than any that can be inflicted on the body. There are pangs of mind more poignant than any merely physical ones. This was of such. And as I watched the vehicle that contained my sister, until it grew indistinct in the distance, and caught the last glance of her loved face, I stood for a moment, as one upon whom a stunning blow had descended, or who was in a fearful waking dream. Surely, if suffering can atone for sin, that must have gone far towards cancelling mine for ever. Starting, however, at length from my lethargy, I rapidly retraced my steps, and quickly regaining the convent, proceeded at once to the chapel ; where, falling on my knees before the altar, I gave vent to my pent-up

feelings in an agony of tears and prayer. Thus I remained, until somewhat of the calm that the latter duty always brings, was restored to me ; and then I endeavoured to obliterate my too earthly emotions, by renewed ardour in the performance of the obligations devolving upon me. In three days afterwards I had quitted England. The main incident of my journey has been given already, and also my sentiments on entering into a Roman Catholic country. Hasten we then to recal some omitted details, which may tend to elucidate the final result, and be of general interest to the reader.

The impression produced by the sight of continental temples of worship, before my arrival at the convent, was only destined to be augmented there. In every prominent place, or public room about the building, pompously-arrayed images of the Virgin Mary stood forth so conspicuously, as to throw every minor representation into shadow. Some of them were tawdry and contemptible enough, it is true, bearing a close resemblance to a huge painted doll, flauntily decked out in flaming colours and tinsel ; but one or two others, those in the Chapel, the Noviciate, &c., were really gorgeously attired ; and the first idea conveyed, was that of a queen in her regal vestments. There, however, alike paltry and grand, they stood ; the first, last, and most palpable objects, within and about the place. " What would be the impression produced on the mind of an untaught, uninitiated person, I wonder ; what *could* be ? " I mentally asked myself, as I gazed in mute surprise, a short time after my arrival. The answer was but one,—“ That Mary

was the ruling deity of the place." Yes; and however words may affirm the contrary, so it is in fact, in effect, and practice. The prayers of the community are by far the most part addressed to her. After each *Mass* even, some petitions are addressed to her mediatorial throne: the very office of the choir is thus consummated; every favour and grace is sought through her intercession. Devotion to her, and reliance on her patronage, is constantly and strenuously inculcated. Before her representation the nuns love to offer up their supplications; and hours thus employed are deemed well-spent. Special seasons of the year, and times of dedication, are set apart to her worship. She is "*Mother of God; Mediatrix of the New Covenant; Mother of Divine Grace; Gate of Heaven; Ark of the Covenant; Cause of our Joy; and Refuge of Sinners.*" And to *her*, instead of Christ, do they go, and on her place their main reliance. If you doubt this, mark only the description of her dress, which is an emblem of her power and offices, as it appeared during the month specially consecrated to her—that of May. At the sight of it, a vague feeling of horror and apprehension took hold of even the benighted mind of her who sought so hard to place faith in her; and though, as usual, earnestly repudiated, it could never entirely be overcome. During this month an altar is erected to her peculiar honour, at the top of which, in all the pomp of regality, an image, almost large as life, represents her standing as queen. On its head is a glittering coronet, from which flows a spotless white veil down to the feet. Her dress itself is white, blue, pink, or a mixture of

either, according to the taste of the dresser ; for she has as many garments appropriated to her as would constitute a rich wardrobe, and they are constantly being diversified. They are all generally, however, fringed with gilt lace, or similar rich material : while often stars and other gewgaws adorn the whole. From one arm, which is slightly extended, to testify her willingness to grant the petitions of her clients, depends a huge bunch of golden keys, the keys of the kingdom ; while on the other arm she sustains a small image of the *infant* Saviour, who looks indeed reduced to that condition, in insignificance and powerlessness, by the side of his omnipotent Mother. On her breast, attached to two massive gilded chains, is displayed an immense heart of the same material, so immense as to attract attention almost beyond every other appendage ; intended of course to emblemize its vast capacity and enlargement of tenderness and compassion towards her worshippers. A smaller heart transfixed, with the sword of sorrow, and many minor adornments, complete the exhibition, around which are placed trees, and flowers, and lights ever burning. Oh, the hours I knelt gazing on that image ! struggling to reconcile it with my ideas of the undivided homage required by a *jealous God*. Then, when unsuccessful, retiring with a mind distressed and bewildered beyond expression at my inability and want of faith. Again, in the Noviciate, were my doubts, and occasionally contempt also, in defiance of every effort to the contrary, destined to be constantly excited. A lesser image of the same kind, saving that it had not the beauty of feature ap-

pertaining to the one described, to redeem it from disgust, was the constant source of veneration, and occupation also, to the poor deluded novices. It was repeatedly being kissed and toyed with, dressed and undressed. The number of habiliments that were brought out as appertaining to it, turned over and played with, on dressing days, might have excited the envy of many a fashionable lady, had their size been susceptible of being rendered available to her use. And the folly and childishness of those who could waste their precious time thus, was instinctively a cause of pity. In such occupation, however, I never joined. In what was immediately allotted to me,—which was for the most part making scapulars and giving English lessons,—with such relief as the questionable character of my thoughts afforded me, I passed the day; hailing the time, however wearied in body, which should bring the exercises of devotion round. As yet I could not join in the difficult choir-offices; and the other public services were all conducted in a foreign tongue: so that, thrown upon myself to choose my petitions, I made such use of the permission as best suited my taste. And these, when free from embarrassing doubts, were the happiest moments of my existence.

But alas! such were of rare occurrence. Every day some fresh circumstance was occurring to prove matter of rumination and anxiety. One day I would perceive a novice crying bitterly, without having the slightest clue to the why, or wherefore, excepting that it was certainly some trial connected with her vocation. Again, the recital of some miracle or

prodigy, too absurd for belief, some fresh instance of idolatrous worship to the Virgin and Saints, or of the absurd veneration paid to relics;* and again, the trust placed in penances and voluntary humiliations, and the unprofitable, unintelligible nature of the religious services of the order, were new enemies to my peace of mind. And, involuntary as such emotions were, the dreadful chain woven around me by confession was sufficient to constitute them, after-sources of disquiet and dread. It was impossible too, at all times, to keep the mind in a devotional frame, for the length of time I was constrained to remain in the attitude of devotion. And often when the over-taxed powers were incapable of another effort, and I was constrained to give the rein to my thoughts, would the question occur too powerfully to admit of refutation. "Whence the profit of such wearisome and useless toil?" Enforced by our Saviour's own words;—"When ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking."†

* Several times I saw the community after Mass approach the altar, and the Priest pass something, which in the distance resembled a small medallion, cased in ivory, across the mouth of each. The movement was too rapid for me to ascertain certainly what it was, or what was implied by the action; and not understanding it, I did not at first join them. Upon inquiry however, I ascertained that it was a relic which was held in high veneration, and which at stated seasons the votaries were privileged to kiss. This is a *trifling* instance amongst many, of the follies alluded to.

† On one occasion, when such thoughts had been particularly active, owing to my having been completely exhausted in both body and mind, by several hours continuous devotion in a most

The illness however which soon seized me, and which has been already described, quickly put an end to reflections arising from any personal observation, but such as the limits of my chamber supplied; though these were extensive enough to be a fruitful source of misery and perplexity. One circumstance occurred which much distressed me, soon after the departure of Euphrasia.* The Novice'-mistress was very anxious to commence a novena† with me, for my fatiguing posture, with but very slight intermission, I came into the Noviciate, thinking to have a littlerest, physically at least, if not mentally. I had scarcely been seated however, ten minutes, when the Novice Mistress—as though she was granting an especial favour—told me, she would *give me permission* to go into the chapel and perform the devotion called “the Stations of our Lord's Passion, or Way of the Cross.” It is as follows: At intervals all around the chapel or church, as it may be, are placed pictures representing the different stages of the Redeemer's passion, from the earliest incident to the final scene of the crucifixion on Calvary. These pictures number fourteen; and attached to the contemplation of each is a pious reflection, a prayer, an invocation to Mary, an “Our Father,” a “*Gloria Patri*,” and two lines of a hymn. The devotee has to make a circuit of the whole church, and recite these prayers before each picture kneeling. This is, as the reader will imagine, no slight fatigue, especially when the individual is worn out by previous exercise of a similar kind. You have to kneel on the bare board or stones, as it may happen, with no kind of support. At that time I *could not* do as desired; had I attempted it, I should soon have fainted. But I remember the effect the circumstance had, I retired to the chapel, and sat and wept; while the thought *forced itself upon me*, “God is indeed more merciful than man.”

* Euphrasia is referred to in “Five Years a Catholic.”

† A Novena is what is commonly called “Nine days prayer.” That is, nine days are set apart by certain individuals for supplications of a special character, according to some established form, to gain any particular object. It is sometimes one set of prayers, sometimes another, but generally to the Virgin and the Saints.

recovery, in order that I might have strength to pursue my vocation, to which I readily consented. The mistress asked me to name the prayers I would best like, giving me leave to select them ; and I immediately chose the Litany of Jesus, and the Lord's Prayer. But there was no *Mariolatry* here, and this did not satisfy the ardent zeal of the worthy lady ; so she immediately recommended the Litany of Mary, to be either substituted, or added ; launching forth into a panegyric upon her, and dwelling on the efficacy of confidence in her. It would appear, however, that there was some indifference manifested in my assent, though it *was* given ; for the panegyrist immediately rejoined ; " Yes ; but you must invoke her with *great confidence*, or your prayers will be unavailing." " I cannot promise that," was the involuntary reply : " I never did feel as much confidence as some do." From that hour there seemed a kind of withdrawal of trust, the effects of which was sensitively felt. Not long afterwards, a young warm-hearted nun of two-and-twenty, who had parted from her mother at a little more than seventeen years of age, and though she had since become widowed, had never returned to her, having entered the religious life from school, without even a last adieu ; seemed desirous of filling Euphrasia's place in my heart. All her spare moments were passed in my sick room, and many a silent demonstration of affection given, that her cold rule would have forbidden her to manifest openly. I feared that such manifestations of regard might be unacceptable, if observed, and though, not having the heart to repulse her, often playfully remonstrated with her

on her earthly affections. More than once the big tears filled the eyes and suffused the countenance, and then I desisted. She loved to speak of her mother, her friends, and seemed to possess a strength of love and tenderness that made me tremble for the future in her regard. At length, one day, she stole in while the community were otherwise engaged, with countenance bearing strong traces of emotion ; and taking my hand, seemed desirous of saying something, but unable.

“What is it, Clara ?” I enquired anxiously. “Why are you so agitated ?”

“Nothing !” was the almost inarticulate reply, while she sealed the denial with a kiss.

“There is, I am certain ; tell me, what is it ?”

She hesitated for another moment, then urged me to promise that I would not let the Novice-mistress know if she told me. I readily gave the pledge ; and then she informed me, that, that individual had reproved her for being so much in the English girls’ room, forbidding her to be so for the future, and requesting to know if she loved me.

In great distress the poor Nun begged me not to think her negligent, or less affectionate if she did not come so frequently as heretofore ; and her young and legitimate affections thus crushed, and denied the most innocent vent, she hurried away, like a person who was in danger of being detected in a crime. There was another postulant who had come from England with me, from the same convent ; and what spare time she could command was also devoted to my sick chamber. She too had left a widowed

mother, who was even now, in every letter (though a devoted Catholic) reproaching her for her cruelty in so doing. She was an only daughter, and her poor disconsolate parent was a constant invalid. I had occasionally seen her weep violently from her struggles of mind, and had been cut to the heart to hear the entreaties of her mother, that she would defer her purpose until she was *at least in the grave*, united with the reproachful assurance that her conduct caused her, to *die daily*; and had listened with eager curiosity, to hear the counsel which would be given by her spiritual advisers. What this was I could never satisfactorily ascertain, until one evening the poor dupe of her fanaticism came hurriedly into the Infirmary, with a flushed check and smiling lip exclaiming; "I am received, I am received."

"Received into the order?" I asked, "have you not been before?"

"No! It requires several askings you know; and though I have asked, I have never received consent until now. Oh, it requires such courage."

"Tell me all about it," said I, motioning her to a chair by my bed.

As though it had been the relation of some highly gratifying incident, the girl began; telling me the humiliating ceremony to which she had had to submit; viz. to go down on her knees in the choir, in full presence of the sisterhood, and with clasped hands drag herself round to each one individually, entreating her permission to be received into their holy community. This formally obtained, it had to be ratified by the mother superior and father confessor, with suit-

able advice, and injunctions on the obligations of the state to which she aspired.

I gazed at the speaker, and thought of her mother's letter of yesterday ;—and under the influence of a tide of emotions, connected with my own lost mother, and far-off home, turned away my head and wept ; mentally thanking God that He had offered such a respite as my illness gave, from the advanced step my companion had taken.

But all these involuntary repugnant and worldly feelings, were like every other of a character alien to my vocation, the cause of constant after remorse and self-reproach. Not one, but my conscience told me ought to be confessed ; and the yoke this cast upon me, with its attendant results, has been already fully delineated. Temptation—so I called it,—followed temptation ; distress, distress ; and regret, regret ; until driven into despair by my accumulated and helpless wretchedness ; and by this, *out of myself* to *Christ* for succour, the yoke fell off, and my fetters snapt asunder : and rejoicing in the light, and newly-found liberty of God's children, I abandoned the idea of conventual life for ever. This change could not long be hidden, nor was the attempt made to conceal it. But no sooner was it manifested to the community, than every effort that could be made to induce me to alter my resolve was put into operation. Promises of doing as I liked, if I remained, only to teach English, hints as to my declension in spiritual life, and the risk I ran by returning to the world ;—insinuations that it was self-love, and dislike of humility, and mortification, each by turns wounded my mind ;

for I felt how vain it was to *hope*, they could ever *understand*, or do me justice.

To give an idea of this kind of persecution, a book was put into my hand upon religious life, containing the usual complement of miracles and legends ; and one anecdote was particularly pointed out for my perusal, as though bearing some analogy to my own case. It was of a Novice in some religious order, (I forget now which) who after proceeding sometime in his vocation with great fervour, suddenly fell away, and professed his intention of returning to the world. He had taken a sudden dislike to the cowl and other parts of the religious habit. He was about to put his determination into execution, when one day a lost spirit from the other world appeared to him, dressed in the habit he so much abhorred ; and looking upon him very sadly, told him, the temptation to which he was about to yield, had been the very cause of his own ruin ; that the devil had excited in his mind the same disgust, thereby drawn him again into the world, and when in it, had effected his eternal damnation. The poor Novice, struck with terror, retraced his steps, and ever after became a fervent *religieux* !

As I recovered, it being the height of summer, I spent hours in the Convent garden which had been so marked a spot to me. And the sweet yet complex emotions of those hours are as incapable of expression, as some that have been referred to of a more painful character. All was loneliness, isolation, and difficulty *without*. But there was now peace within, and amply compensating peace too. The thought of the past would now and then intrude an unwelcome

visitant to adulterate my happiness. But it had no lasting power. One good effect resulted even from *it*—the gratitude excited for the present blissful change. Though bereft of every other aid, God was with me; and I felt His grace sufficient, and His strength made perfect in my weakness.

It was the last evening of my residence at the Convent. The following morning was to witness my departure for my native land. As is always the case with a warm heart, and sensitive mind, the remembrance of parted hours, however many bitter ingredients may have composed them, is not unalloyed by emotions of regret. There is a halo around the *by-gone*, a softened shadow on the days sped for ever to such natures, which hardly the recollection of seasons of unmingled grief can entirely efface. But, oh! when joy has mingled with sorrow, when blessing unutterable has followed the brief night of suffering; when all the nobler attributes of being have been called forth by God's own hand, and the soul raised from the dust in which it was grovelling, to *his* favour and the light of *his* countenance; and this by a way the spirit knew not, save that it was chequered, rugged, thorny; who *then* shall tell the mingled elements which compose the emotions of the soul? I could not define them, but still weak to a degree I reclined on a garden seat, and under their influence, freely indulged in a fit of weeping. Just then, once more, the softened tone of the sisters' voices reached my ear; and with feelings strangely overcome, I determined for the last time to join in their evening devotions, and certify myself that no harsh judgment had been formed by

me, with respect to their character. I entered and tried to mingle my prayers with theirs. The test was more than sufficient. The words faltered on my tongue. Invocations to the Virgin formed their whole sum. The huge image, shewing more gorgeous and heathen-like in the pale light of the tapers burning around it, as contrasted to the deep shadows of twilight, now gathering darkly, the bending votaries in their sable garbs, rapidly repeating a reiterated formula of supplication, all to *her*, until the ear wearied, and the attention alike, with the vain repetition ; the distance to which the Saviour, *now my* Saviour, seemed banished ; the awful idea, that such a mediatrix should be chosen before *Him*, and such a doctrine inculcated as the *merit* of so blind and senseless a form of worship, produced at once an impression so conclusive that no doubt hereafter ever could find place. And, almost with a feeling of guilt in having attempted to join in the idolatrous service, I sat down to await its conclusion.

It needed but one more incident to strengthen my position, as entirely as it needed to be ; and that—as if a parting favour—was that night bestowed.

Scarcely had the community retired to rest when a heavy storm of thunder and lightning burst forth in awful grandeur. The sisterhood alarmed, many of them returned to the chapel to continue their devotions. Those however who had gone to bed remained, and I was one of the number. Flash succeeded flash, and peal, peal ; until the tempest gained a fearful ascendancy. Just at the time it was at about its height, the door of my apartment was opened, and

one of the lay-sisters entered, bearing in one hand a clay vessel, and in the other a brush. I gazed for a moment in surprise at such an unlooked-for apparition, when the simple-hearted creature approached me, and dipping the brush into the vessel, sprinkled what it had imbibed upon me, desiring me at the same time to touch it with my fingers, as a protection against the dangers of the storm. Mechanically I obeyed, with an ironical smile ; partly because it was in vain to contend with her on the point, and partly because I felt grateful for her good nature, and would not pain her. But it was as though a signet had been placed on all my former resolves and convictions, to guard them from the possibility of change for ever. With a thankful heart, on the following morning, I bade adieu to the community, and in two days afterwards embraced my beloved sister in London. From that hour, to the present, no sentiment but one of unmingled gratitude to my heavenly Father, has even for a moment shadowed my mind ; and my fervent and constant prayer is, that I may henceforth devote my heart, life, energies, and every other gift to his service, who has brought me thus graciously out of " the land of Egypt, and the house of bondage."

And now may I be forgiven, if yet a few moments longer I detain the attention of my patient reader. Painful, and I fear tedious, as my Narrative has been, I feel as though I cannot dismiss it, without a few words farther to those who have kindly followed its progress. More of myself I would not speak—for I have been already too distressingly my own

subject—were I not in a manner constrained by the cause of truth. I cannot help fearing that some, perhaps, who have perused these pages, may have deemed me harsh in my judgment of the religion I once professed and advocated. To say that I have been *scrupulously* careful in every statement I have made, is doing myself *bare justice*, for the value of every *expression* has been weighed; and frequently where I have feared even a *phrase* may convey more to *other* minds than I have exactly intended—though fully clear in my *own* as to its adaptation—I have exchanged it for one less liable to such possible misconception: nay, more, the whole has been penned, I can humbly say, as in the searching presence of the God of truth, and in view of that strict and awful judgment to which we are all so rapidly hastening. That I have rather under-stated than exaggerated my *own* impressions of the system, I unhesitatingly affirm; for *could* I have adequately conveyed them, I should have shrunk from the task. As it is, the remembrance of former friends, some of them the good and sincere, has rendered what I have accomplished, difficult enough. Long indeed I struggled with my feelings, ere I could make up my mind to write as I have done; but against those feelings a sense of duty has at length prevailed, and what has been heretofore buried a dark secret within my own bosom is thus given to the world. Much more I could have said with the utmost regard to truth; but what some perhaps would call an extreme of conscientiousness has withheld me. The feeling under which I have written, has indeed amounted to positive *dread* of

penning a single word, that in the hour of death the tenderest conscience might recal with even a shade of doubt, and I have therefore perhaps weakened the force of my testimony more than I otherwise might have done. But the word of exhortation I cannot forbear. A few perhaps there may be amongst my readers, especially my youthful ones, who are in danger of entering the same dangerous path, the avenue of escape from which, I have only just found. Is it so? Do I address such? Then, my dear fellow-traveller to eternity, whoever you are, listen to the advice of one who has purchased the right to give it, at much personal cost and sorrow. *Pause long, reflect well*, and, oh! above all, *pray*. Take not *another step* in the fatal career you meditate, before you have earnestly, solemnly, repeatedly, and, divested to the utmost of the most *latent* spirit of self-will,—implored the light and direction of that God, who has promised his Spirit to guide the sincere seeker into “all truth.” Is the mediation of the Virgin Mary, instead of that of the “sole Mediator” that truth? Is the substitution of human merit, for that of the “all-perfect righteousness of the Son of God” that truth? Are the secret abominations of the too-often polluted confessional that truth? In the depths of your own heart let *his* still small voice reply, who “is of too pure eyes to behold iniquity.” I am not speaking for effect, believe me; nor are they words without meaning I address to you. I bring no vague insinuations, no doubtful charges which I cannot substantiate, against the cor-

rupt system which so boldly claims to be *the sole depository of truth*. I have read, as you may have read, the best theological works of its most eminent divines in its defence, and seen the gloss they give to its deformity; sufficient to mislead, as they have misled, numbers of the wisest and best instructed. But I have seen it too in its *practical, working tendency*; I have watched it in its most *minute developments*; I have *proved* it in my own experience. For five years I have practised all its laws and ordinances, and partaken of its so-called sacraments. I have been intimate with its priesthood, with its devoted religious of both sexes, and on terms of dearest friendship with some of its most pious laity. I have been in convents and monasteries both in England and on the Continent, and all this time I was most sincerely desirous to believe,—indeed using every effort of which I was capable, to *compel* myself to believe—that it was the very truth of God. In my mental struggles I have wasted youth, health, and energy: I would not wish my worst enemy to go through the ordeal which I have done. I had made a public profession of my faith to the world. I had voluntarily pledged myself to it by writing in its defence. Dearest interests bound me to it. The esteem of those whose good opinion was once my highest ambition, strengthened the bond. In renouncing it, the sacrifices were all on my side. I surely cannot be called an uninformed or a prejudiced witness; nor can it be said that self-interest has prompted my renunciation of it. And yet I *have* renounced it. And I here unequivocally

record my deliberate conviction, that *it is the most corrupt and mischievous form of religion that has ever usurped the name of Christianity*; that it robs the divine Redeemer of his sublimest prerogatives; that it insults the Omnipotent on the throne of his Supreme Majesty; while its end and aim, as far as the human race is concerned, is to arrogate to one class of mankind the rights and offices of Deity Himself, in order that they may be able to enslave and hold in the most abject servility, the remaining mass.

Few, I know, are willing to profit by the experience of others. There is a perversity in human nature that must often be taught painfully before it will learn practically. It was my own case. Nor dare I censure where I have been so culpable. And yet, *would* that I could speak one efficacious word of warning. For my knowledge has not only been purchased with pain, but *danger*. It is this makes me so earnest that if possible it may avail somewhat to others. Shall it do so? I know I cannot command success. But this at least I would entreat. Follow not *lightly*—*knowing its real character*—a *semblance* of beauty, *within* which all is corruption; run not madly—*being forewarned*—on the brink of a precipice, down which you *may* fall headlong: all are not favoured as I have been: all do not escape, as I have escaped. And the system which develops doctrines so awful, and is fraught with abuses so foul as those I have pourtrayed in the foregoing narrative, *cannot* be the religion which emanates from a *Holy God*. Whence then is its origin? There is but *one* source whence

all evil springs. There is no doubt upon the question. Oh ! fly from it as from an incipient pestilence, and tempt not the Omnipotent That He may deign to bless my poor unworthy effort to the good of only one erring fellow-sinner, is the highest boon I crave.

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